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## A Bad Lot.\*

By MRS. LOVETT CAMERON,

Author of "IN A GRASS COUNTRY," "A SISTER'S SIN," "JACK'S SECRET,"  
"A TRAGIC BLUNDER," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER XXXI.

#### THE SISTERS PART COMPANY.

A COMFORTABLE-LOOKING red-brick house, standing in the hollow between high hills that are wooded to their summits, with sloping lawns and garden beds gay with flowers in front of it, and a trout stream gurgling over shining pebbles beyond the gardens. Beyond, again, a green park, studded with clumps of fine beeches and giant elms, and an avenue of lime trees, whose lowermost branches sweep the green turf beneath them, leading all the way down from the house to the lodge gate. This is Ringwood Manor, the country residence of Sir Robert and Lady Forrester, and here it is that we are to find Eleanor Forrester again.

For her uncle had offered her a home. Very soon after her father's death, he had written to her and had proposed that she should take up her abode with him and become her aunt's amanuensis, for the not very magnificent sum of fifty pounds a year.

Somehow or other, Sir Robert had managed to convince his wife that it had become their duty as Christians to do something for those poor girls—his brother's orphaned and penniless daughters.

Lady Forrester, who was nothing if she was not a Christian, admitted the claim, but could not see why the youngest, and not the eldest daughter should be the object of their charity.

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"I don't think you would like the elder ones so well, my dear Catherine," had answered her spouse discreetly.

"But was it not this one who was engaged to be married, and who jilted the young man in some disgraceful manner?" persisted her ladyship.

"I am not sure," replied Sir Bob evasively and mendaciously, "I rather think it was the second girl." For he was a much hen-pecked individual, and stood in great awe of his wife.

"Well, of course, as Evangeline is only sixteen and won't come out for another year and a half, I cannot make any very great objection; if she were older it would be different—for to have another young lady in the house standing in the light of my own daughter would be insufferable; however, so long as she goes away before Evangeline grows up——"

"Oh, she will be married long before that," cried the husband incautiously.

"Why?" inquired his wife drily. "Is she so extraordinarily good-looking then? Men do not marry penniless girls unless they are very handsome."

"Oh—so, so! I think I told you that she was a pretty girl?"

"You did not, Bob; but I begin to understand." She not only understood, but was considerably disconcerted when Nell appeared on the scenes. This tall and beautiful young woman took her breath away, she looked like a queen, not in the least like a poor relation.

Several things had combined to make Nell accept her uncle's offer; strange things that had somehow come to pass and that had left her indeed no other alternative.

It was about a fortnight after their father's death, when the girls were beginning to pack up, preparatory to turning out of the house, that Dottie came one day rather mysteriously into her sister's room.

"Nell," she began, with a queer hesitation in her voice and a little timid smile not habitual to big, bold, noisy Dottie, "I have something to tell you—something very extraordinary—it is the most extraordinary thing in short that has ever happened."

Nell looked interested; she could not guess in the least what was coming.

"Well, the fact is," said Dottie, getting very red and stammering a good deal, "I—I don't at all know why—and I am

sure nobody could have been more astonished than I was—in fact I said directly, ‘Who on earth told you to do such a mad thing?’ For, you see, one would think nobody in their senses could possibly be such a fool as to want it of their own accord, unless of course some other fellow had put it into his head; but the extraordinary thing is, that no one seems to have done that at all!”

“My dear Dottie,” said Nell, beginning to laugh, “what in the world are you driving at? I can’t make head or tail of all this! What has happened?”

“Why—it’s just this, Nell: Poppet has asked me to marry him.”

“Dottie!”

“You may well look astonished. I was, I can tell you. I burst out laughing and told him not to be such a silly ass.”

“But I don’t think him an ‘ass’ at all, Dottie. I think Mr. Popham a very lucky fellow.”

“Do you?” said Dottie dubiously and rather sheepishly.

“All I want to understand, dear, is what Mr. Popham proposes to marry you upon? I thought he was so poor?”

“Well, you see, he has got his pay, for of course he couldn’t afford to leave the army—in point of fact I should not wish him to give up his profession, and I shall like to live in the regiment, it will just suit me—and then he has had a bit of luck lately: an uncle he never saw has just died in Australia, leaving a thousand pounds apiece to him and to each of his brothers and sisters. And then again, he has been just ordered to leave the depôt here and to join his regiment out at Poonah, and he is going out in three weeks’ time. In India, you see, Nell, they get higher pay. I think I shall like India; it will be such a complete change, and they have very jolly race meetings sometimes out there, I hear.”

“My dear Dottie, you don’t mean to say that you are thinking of going out to India—in three weeks’ time? of being married by then?” cried Nell in amazement.

Dottie nodded. “Why not?” she replied complacently. “We can get spliced up very quietly, Jim and I—we don’t want any fuss or display. And besides,” added Dottie naively, “I couldn’t possibly let him go out to India without me; for you see I am six years older than he is—and not a wonderful catch as you will admit—and ten to one he would see some other younger girl out there, and take a fancy to her, and then I should lose him altogether. And, I do think, Nell, you ought to see from your own

experience what a mistake long engagements are ; men are not very constant, you know, and delay only gives them time to think better of it. 'Strike whilst the iron is hot,' say I."

As there was no gainsaying the truth and aptness of this maxim, Nell became quickly reconciled to the idea of Dottie's hasty marriage.

Out of the wreck of their fortunes there had been rescued a couple of hundred pounds to be divided between the three sisters, and Dottie, having just before her father's death fortunately pulled off twenty pounds successfully over a country steeplechase, happened in this way to have a little ready money wherewith to purchase for herself a modest but necessary outfit.

One morning, therefore, about a week before the day appointed for Gordon Forrester's daughters to turn out of the old house where they had spent their lives, Dottie and her two sisters walked very quietly down together to the parish church.

All three wore the same black dresses in which they had been clad at their father's funeral, only that each of them had—on this occasion—enlivened the sombre garments by a bunch of coloured flowers at the neck, and the bride had hunted up a last year's white straw bonnet, wore a new pair of grey gloves, and carried a large bouquet in her hand, the gift of the bridegroom.

The vicar, behind the altar rails, and Messrs. Popham and Drake in front of them, awaited their arrival, whilst the old clerk—who had seen them all baptized—took his place proudly behind them, with a red peony in the button-hole of his Sunday coat, in order to give Dottie away.

After the ceremony, they all walked back together to Marshlands to a frugal lunch. Then came a frantic finishing off of the packing, hurried good-byes, a few tears, and many smiles and kisses, and very soon Dottie and her husband were driven away quietly enough, in the shabby brougham which the bridegroom had hired from Fenchester for the occasion, on the first stage of their long journey to India.

After her departure, Millie and Nell were left to consider their own future. They did not hit it off particularly well together, these two, and Nell had certainly no wish to set up house alone with Millie. It speedily appeared, however, that Millie had no such intention ; she had made her own plans long ago, quite independently of either of her sisters.



She had a scheme for making her fortune. For a long time past her love of animals had led her to dabble in the veterinary science, and she had lately invented an ointment of an entirely new kind for the treatment of diseased hoofs in horses. This stuff—to which she had given the magnificent name of "Forrester's Nonpareil Golconda Hoof Ointment"—she had concocted on several occasions secretly in a saucepan over the back kitchen fire, and what were the component parts thereof she would reveal to no living soul. She had already contrived to pot a considerable quantity of it, and had labelled it with printed labels. She had experimentally treated one or two horses in the immediate neighbourhood with it, and in every instance had met with a marked success—so much so, that she was now quite certain that she would be able to make a good thing out of her invention.

There happened to be a very good opening in Fenchester for an enterprise of the kind. The only veterinary surgeon was acknowledged on all sides to be an exceedingly stupid and inefficient man, and was now getting on in years, and no younger man had as yet presented himself to take up his falling mantle. People took their horses farther off—to the next county town, twelve miles away—to be doctored; and although Millie was aware that she was entering the ranks as an uncertificated quack, she was quite sure that if she had one or two successful cases to begin with, she would be able, very soon, to establish a reputation for her ointment.

When she told Nell what she proposed to do, everything was already in train and all was cut and dried for her venture. Without saying a word to any one, she had engaged two ground-floor rooms and a large back garden in one of the main streets in the town of Fenchester, and a bedroom for herself at the top of the same house. She had also secured an office boy to sit in the small outer room, which was to be the shop, and to show those who wished to consult her into the larger room beyond. The back garden she proposed to turn into a hospital for sick dogs, as well as a home for lost ones—dogs and their ailments being a specialty with her—and a shed was already being built against the further wall for their accommodation.

"And you intend then to turn yourself into a sort of female vet?" said Nell blankly and with some dismay, when all the details of this extraordinary scheme were disclosed to her.

"Certainly, and I don't see why I should not do very well," answered Millie rather defiantly.

"But, my dear Millie, won't it be a dreadful life for you? I cannot conceive anything more dreary and dismal."

"Oh, not at all. I shall have all my soldier boys dropping in and out upon me at all hours—and I shall make my own sitting-room, behind the shop, very snug and cosy; you must come and see it, it is a very nice room; the window opens on to the garden, and there will be the dogs, you know—my own dogs, of course, as well as any others that may be left with me to cure or to take care of. Then I shall have lots of fun in the winter, when the hunting begins; I can always hire something or get a mount, and perhaps I shall take to breaking in horses for ladies' riding, in addition. I have lots of irons in the fire, you see. I am not at all sure that I shall not be able to afford to keep a hunter for myself by next hunting season. I have made out that each pot of the ointment costs me exactly fivepence halfpenny to make, and I am going to sell it at three and sixpence a pot, so you can just calculate for yourself what my profits will be; and I have got no less than a hundred and ten pots of it in hand now—they are all going upon the shelves in the front shop to-morrow—and I expect they will go off like wildfire. *The Field* has already written me up—the ointment, I mean—of course, you never read *The Field*, my dear, and even if you had seen the article about the 'Golconda,' you would not have known that I had anything to do with it. Tooley wrote it, he knows somebody on the staff of *The Field*, who got his letter put in for him; it has done me an awful lot of good already. I had twenty-three orders within the first week after it came out, and now I am spending that money in advertising the 'Golconda' both in *The Field* and all the other sporting papers, every week."

"Do you think it is a very nice occupation for a lady, Millie?" persisted Nell doubtfully.

"I am sure I neither know nor care, my dear. What has being 'a lady' done for me hitherto? or for any of us for the matter of that? I'm not giving up any social advantages that I know of by going into a business of this kind! These blessed stuck-up frumps and prudes of women about here have taken precious good care to close their doors in our faces all along, and now that your engagement is broken off, everybody charitably gives

you credit for having done something disgraceful, and the few people who had thawed a little to us for a time—on your account—have now frozen themselves back again into icicles. Do you suppose I am going to alter my plans to please any one of them? If I choose to go to the public balls, I can go just the same—I am certain to have lots of partners; my pals are not at all likely to throw me over because I sell ointment."

Nell was thus left to contemplate her own future plans somewhat perplexedly.

"You, I daresay, will go and live with Granny," Millie had suggested airily and lightly. And perhaps that is actually what Nell would have had to do—to beg for a home from her grandmother—had not her uncle's letter at this juncture opened a new, and she believed a better way out of the dilemma.

Nell wanted to leave the old life and its associations behind her; she had shrunk from the thought of that silent, dingy house in Wimpole Street, where so much ill-fortune had befallen her in the past and where she did not believe there could possibly lie any profitable life for her in the future. Old Lady Forrester would very probably be glad to give her a home, for she was very fond of Nell in her own way, but she did not need her in the least. Her old lady's-maid looked after her comforts and her health, whilst her games of patience or of cribbage, and the ancient beaux of her younger days who came to have a gossip with her over her tea cups, made up the sum of the occupations of the old lady's life. She did not require anything else, there was therefore no duty that Nell could have rendered her; and, moreover, at the bottom of her heart, the girl shrank from a perpetual intercourse with the worldly maxims, cold cynicism, and the unscrupulous and mercenary considerations which ruled Lady Forrester's existence, and which were as much a part of her being as the air she breathed. Nell feared that were she to be too much in such an atmosphere, she might herself, one day, become such another as her grandmother. "It is in me, I verily believe," she said to herself grimly. "Already I believe in nobody, and see false motives and bad natures in other people. Who knows if in time I might not become as bad as Granny, and grow deceitful, and hard and callous, as she is."

And then came her uncle's letter and invitation.

Here at any rate was something definite—a new life that might

be cleaner and wholesomer than any she had lived hitherto—a life wherein she might shake herself free of all the old influences and start afresh under purer skies.

"I do not know quite what an 'amanuensis' has to do," she wrote back to her uncle, "but I will help Aunt Catherine in any way that I can, and I accept your kind offer of a home and a salary gladly, and very gratefully."

So it was, that when Millie set up herself and her pots of "Golconda Ointment" in the ground-floor rooms in Strand Street, Fenchester, Nell and her two trunks, which contained all her worldly possessions, set off by herself to begin the world anew, under Sir Robert Forrester's roof at Ringwood Manor.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### A NOTICE IN THE "TIMES."

NELL FORRESTER'S life at Ringwood was the quietest and most tranquil existence that could possibly be conceived.

The peace of it indeed, and the monotony, almost amounted to stagnation, and it took her many weeks to become accustomed to it.

This new life, where meals and occupations succeeded one another in unbroken regularity, where each member of the household seemed to speak and move as though actuated by clock-work, where to make an original remark would have been to create dismay, and where unpunctuality was looked upon as an actual sin, bewildered Nell almost as much as it startled her.

Sometimes indeed, at first, she felt sure that she could no longer be herself, and that her soul must somehow have become re-incarnated in the personality of some one else, so strange and so unreal seemed everything about her.

Her very name was no longer the same; that old familiar little name of "Nell," that had grown up with her and stuck to her from childhood, was never given to her now-a-days. From the first she was always called "Eleanor" at Ringwood. The very place itself seemed to oppress and choke her. The high wooded hills that rose on every side of the house were strange and uncongenial to her; she could not breathe in these narrow valleys. She pined for the wide wind-swept spaces of her native fens; for the broad expanse of sky and cloud, and for the salt-laden breezes that

used to come whistling over the water meadows from the low shores of the eastern sea. At Ringwood, she felt cramped and imprisoned ; there was at first a perpetual longing to escape upon her that used to lead her to take long solitary climbs up the steep hills. If she could only look over the summits on to the wide hidden world beyond ! But, alas, when she arrived panting and breathless upon the hill tops, it was only to find a land of more hills and more woods, more deep and narrow valleys, which bounded the view in every direction. After a while, indeed, she grew to love this country too, and to own that it was beautiful, with a peculiar beauty all its own. For Nell had such an instinctive sympathy with Nature, that she could not remain blind for long to the charms of these thick shady woods that crept up the hill sides, with the deep sequestered glades that lay between them. Yet, at first, even their beauty only made the strangeness of her new life seem more intolerable and more bewildering. She had, however, plenty to do, and very little time to indulge either in dreams or in regrets. For if she had never been rightly able to discover wherein lay the exact duties of an "amanuensis," she had at any rate found out that there were a great many ways in which, as a poor relation, she was expected to earn her food, as well as her modest stipend of twelve pounds ten a quarter.

Nell came to the conclusion that her aunt set her to do all the things which were beneath the dignity of the lady's maid and the footman. Her first duty in the morning was to clean out the aviary and feed the birds. Once a week she washed Lady Forrester's Maltese terrier, and every day it was her business to cut up the dinners of this animal and of its companion, a handsome Persian cat. As she was fond of animals, she did not in the least object to this branch of her duties. It was more irksome to her to be the instrument of Lady Forrester's charities in the parish, which were numerous and varied ; she was expected to carry cans of broth and beef tea to the old women at the almshouses, to distribute bread and coal tickets from door to door, to act as librarian to the village library, to cut out flannel petticoats and shirts of unbleached calico, and to assist at the meetings of the "Girls' Friendly Society." Besides all this, she arranged the flowers, wrote the *menus*, fetched and carried shawls and cushions, ran errands to the general shop at the post office, and once a week she was sent by train into the country town with a long list of

commissions to execute at the grocer's and the linendraper's and the ironmonger's. In short, she found that she was expected to make herself generally useful in all sorts of ways.

Yet nobody was in the least unkind to her, and she could not reasonably complain of neglect, or of unfriendliness. Lady Forrester always spoke gently and considerately to her, and never forgot to say "thank you" every time she did anything for her.

Major Pryor had once called Lady Forrester ugly, and had passed a deteriorating remark upon the shape of her nose. He had perhaps been justified in his uncomplimentary remarks, for Lady Forrester could never, even in early youth, have been good-looking. She was a hard, angular, bony woman, with high shoulders and high cheek-bones, and there was undoubtedly an undue elevation in the bridge of her nasal organ which might warrant that irreverent simile to the nose of the rhinoceros which the worthy major had applied to it. Yet, in spite of her ugliness, Lady Forrester looked a lady—there was at any rate nothing common or under-bred, either in her appearance or her manners.

She ordered her household well and prudently, and ruled it with a rod of iron. Her servants did their work, her children did their lessons, and her charities were carried on vigorously and conscientiously, without ostentation or display. She was energetic and active, and she expected every one else about her to be the same. She nourished a scarcely veiled contempt for her indolent, easy-going husband, who loved to dawdle his life away over a novel in winter, and in summer time to wander along the trout stream with his rod, for the whole of the long lazy afternoons.

Nell would gladly have been her uncle's companion on these occasions, but, as a matter of fact, she saw very little of him, a fact which she regretted, for she liked him, and he was inclined to be indulgent to her for the sake of her lovely face and tall graceful figure, which excited his admiration; but his wife took care that he had very little opportunity of fraternizing with his niece. She was dully jealous of Nell's beauty and grace, and although she was a just woman, she had within her those ineradicable feminine qualities which render a plain woman sore and angry at the attention which is attracted by her better favoured sisters. From the first, Lady Forrester determined that



Nell must be kept in the background ; her husband, poor foolish creature, would no doubt have brought her forward. He would have liked to have seen her amongst his guests at dinner, and would have taken her out to those dull and dreary festivities named garden parties, with which, in summer time, in common with all other country districts, the neighbourhood abounded. Sir Robert, in short, would have gladly treated Nell as an elder daughter, and would have delighted in the admiration which she would certainly have aroused.

But Lady Forrester would have nothing of the kind. She put her foot down upon all such nonsense from the first. For Evangeline's sake in the future, she told her husband, it would not do to bring this penniless niece too much forward ; but, if the whole truth be told, it was also somewhat on her own account as well ; for to be overshadowed in her own county by the superior attractions of a poor dependant, would not have been at all agreeable to Lady Forrester. So Nell was kept in the background, hard at work at her numerous little drudging duties, and no one saw very much of her beyond the limits of the park and village.

She had nothing to do with her cousins—they had their governess and lived their own orderly life, independent of her. There were three daughters, of whom Evangeline was the eldest, and one younger boy, who was at school. Evangeline, despite her poetical name, was not in the least poetical to look at. She was an uncouth, awkward girl, very like her mother : a good, but ugly and entirely uninteresting maiden of sixteen. Nell used to watch her young cousin, with a certain pity, as she plodded through her daily tasks ; toiling patiently over her lesson books, strumming unmusically at her music, or going through manifold unpleasant contortions with a back-board and a chest-expander, and she remembered, with an amused sense of the contrast, what her own life had been at sixteen.

At Evangeline's age no one had taken care of Nell. Nobody had taught her anything, and she had been left entirely to her own resources, with the result that she had already gone through that fatal experience which had turned her from a child into a woman.

Well, temptation of that kind was not likely to come in Evangeline's way ! She was safe, at any rate, from so stormy an opening

chapter of life, saved both by her careful bringing up and also by her lack of beauty from the things which had shipwrecked her own career. Nell used to catch herself wondering whether she and Evangeline would be judged one day by the self-same standard.

Often, during the first few months after her father's death, Nell had pondered and mused over the unfathomable mystery of Julian Temple's entire and incomprehensible silence. No word nor sign whatever from him had come to her. He seemed to have passed entirely out of her existence; and yet he must surely have heard, not only that her engagement to Cecil was at end, but also that she had lost her father. The latter event, at any rate, might, she thought, have elicited some line of sympathy and regret from him, however brief and formal. That he should not approach her in this way, at least, seemed to her to be strange indeed. She could only account for it by the supposition that, having heard Cecil's version of her broken engagement, he had adopted his friend's harsh and unjust condemnation of her, and believed her now to be utterly unworthy of his regard.

Unhappy as this thought made her, she grew in time, and by the force of circumstances, to resign herself to it with a dull apathy. The cynicism which had become part of her being helped her to say to herself, hardly and bitterly:

"There should be no wonder about it—he is only like the rest, I suppose. Men are always unjust and hard to the women who love them. Even their love is nothing but selfishness, and from the very moment that love becomes an inconvenience to himself—who so clever as a man in shaking off the bonds that are a discomfort to him!"

So she told herself that Julian Temple was only an incident of her past life, which it would be true wisdom on her part to leave behind her and to forget.

And so the long summer glory drew to an end, and after that the golden tints of autumn decked the woods with new brilliance, and these again faded in their turn, until in October there came one piece of news to Nell Forrester—one echo from the outer world which reached her faintly in the silence and solitude of her peaceful country life.

For she read one morning, in the first column of the *Times*

newspaper, the announcement of Cecil Roscoe's marriage to Ida Vincent.

He had not taken long then to forget her and console himself. But why had he married Ida Vincent? That was what puzzled her. She remembered Miss Vincent very well indeed; she had thought her a plain-featured and uninteresting little woman, who had talked to her in a somewhat offensive and disagreeable manner on that memorable evening when she had dined in Rutland Gate, and when Julian Temple had taken her down to dinner.

Nell tried to recall the conversation that had taken place between Miss Vincent and herself after dinner that evening. She remembered well that she had somewhat annoyed and ruffled her, by her constant references to her extreme intimacy with Cecil and his family; so much so, that at the time she had wondered why this young lady had gone out of her way to talk so disagreeably to her. Afterwards, with a little natural suspicion in her mind, she had questioned Cecil about this Miss Vincent, who had so ostentatiously proclaimed herself to be his dearest and oldest friend, but Cecil had betrayed a total indifference towards this companion of his youth.

"Oh, poor little Ida!" he had said carelessly; "she is quite harmless—a good little soul, I believe. My mother and my aunt make a great pet of her; she rather bores me, I confess, for I have never been able to see what they can find in her. I always have thought her perfectly amiable, but utterly uninteresting."

That answer had satisfied Nell, that whatever might have prompted Miss Vincent's distinctly unpleasant and aggressive remarks to herself, it could not at any rate have been jealousy, for Cecil had evidently never taken the faintest interest in his mother's young *protégée*.

Now, however, in the light of this most unforeseen marriage, the matter began to assume a new aspect to her. Frequently, when we come to look back upon past events of our lives, with the dispassionate judgment which comes to us with time and with distance, so that we are able to see things with the clearness, not of actors, but of lookers on, these past events appears to us with an altogether different complexion to that with which they were endued at the time. Nell began to perceive now the meaning of the steadfast opposition which had been shown towards her by Cecil's relations. No doubt they had wanted him to marry

Miss Vincent. She remembered now that the fact of her being a considerable heiress had somehow come to her knowledge, and it was on account of her money, doubtless, that they wished her to become his wife. They had *very likely* worked and striven and toiled by all the means in their power to bring *this thing* about, and the girl herself had been evidently perfectly willing. What a blow then to all their schemes and plans his sudden engagement to herself must have been! No wonder that Cecil's mother and aunt had disliked her and treated her as an interloper, and that they had done their utmost to exaggerate and to make the worst of all the objections to the marriage that they could get hold of. And no wonder, too, that Ida Vincent, who had perhaps set her heart upon him, had been unable to conceal her spite and her mortification from her successful rival.

And, then again, was it not through her acquaintance with Miss Vincent that Mrs. Hartwood had been able to relate her little history about Colonel Darley and herself to Cecil's mother and aunt?

All at once, too, Nell recollected the painted sofa-cushion in Mrs. Roscoe's drawing-room, and the coffee that had been accidentally spilt on it, which had led to the mention of the clergyman's widow who supported herself by painting on satin and who had given lessons to Miss Vincent in her art.

Of course, that clergyman's widow had been none other than Mrs. Hartwood. She had been dimly conscious of it at the time, she remembered, and now the various pieces of the puzzle began to dove-tail themselves together with an extraordinary distinctness.

It was Ida Vincent then, who, with the help of Mrs. Hartwood, had plotted and schemed to ruin her with Cecil—and now she had married him.

She had no doubt loved him all along and had been bent upon discrediting her to him, and having successfully achieved her object, she had evidently caught his heart at a rebound.

It was all clear as daylight to her now.

"Poor Cecil!" thought Nell compassionately, when she had puzzled all this out in her own mind; and it is possible that she had never pitied anybody so sincerely in her life before.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## AMONGST THE ALPS.

THERE had been, not unnaturally, much rejoicing in Rutland Gate—carefully repressed, however, into a decent show of outward sympathy—over the abrupt termination of Cecil Roscoe's engagement.

He had said as little about it as he could—and that little had been spoken to his mother—and he had refrained from entering into any details of the whys and wherefores of it even to her.

"Do you mean to tell me that shameless and ungrateful creature has jilted you?" inquired his mother with hot indignation, when first he had communicated his news to her.

"Nothing of the sort," Cecil had replied shortly and irritably. "She has not jilted me at all, and pray do not call her names; it is by mutual consent that we have ended the engagement."

"Well, I am deeply and truly thankful!" murmured his mother.

"Then, show your thankfulness, my dear mother, by never alluding to the subject again. It must be sufficient for you to know that I am not going to marry Miss Forrester; pray forbear from annoying me by questions and surmises about it."

Afterwards, as was natural, the mother and Mrs. Torrens talked the matter over fully and exhaustively.

"Depend upon it, Louisa," said the latter lady, with a note of triumph in her voice, "depend upon it, that he has found her out! I was certain he would. He has no doubt discovered something fresh against her. Ah, my dear, bad blood, as I have always told you, can never be eradicated; it is quite hopeless to expect a dove to be hatched in a serpent's nest."

Mrs. Roscoe agreed with a sigh that such a zoological miracle did not come within the range of the possibilities of natural history. "We can only be thankful that my dear boy's eyes have been opened in time," she murmured.

"As I always foresaw that they must be," said Mrs. Torrens, almost with delight. "It has been all ordered for the best, my dear: the Lord watches over His own; and to suppose that a creature born of such a stock as that would be permitted to enter a

respectable and God-fearing family, was to doubt the omnipotence of the Divine Mercy."

"There may be a chance for dear Ida, *now*," observed the mother; "her money, you know, Selina, would be such a help to my dear boy."

"Undoubtedly there is a chance, my dear," assented Mrs. Torrens decidedly, for her piety did not prevent the good lady from taking a most unheavenly interest in things purely productive of mundane advantages. "We must have patience, and place our trust and confidence in One above, and play our cards carefully and judiciously."

The days went on—Cecil came home night after night looking worn and ill. He happened to be unusually busy, and for some time his mother, who observed with dismay that he grew paler and thinner every day, believed that it was the extra stress of business that was telling upon his health. But after a few weeks she began to perceive that there must be something more than hard work to account for her son's haggard and careworn appearance. He began to throw up his social engagements, he lost his spirits and his appetite, complained of violent headaches, and of entire sleeplessness at nights. The fact was, that Cecil was a prey to severe mental suffering. He believed, indeed, that he had done right in rejecting Nell, that she was false, and bad, and utterly unworthy of an honest man's affection, and he did not for one moment desire to recall the past, for Dottie's injudicious letter had probably quenched altogether any reactionary weakness that might have lingered in his heart.

But his beliefs and his determination had nevertheless cost him dear. A man does not go through such an experience unscathed. He suffered acutely, both in his heart and in his vanity—and the greater of these two in the composition of that animal we call man is, most undoubtedly, the latter. For you may wound a man's heart, and he will recover from the blow—often indeed with a celerity that is positively amazing—but if you wound his vanity, it is quite another matter, and he will carry the scars of that injury with him to his grave.

In Cecil's case, the wound was deep and sore, and the immediate result of it was a collapse of his bodily health.

There came a day when he broke down altogether. He came home in a cab early one afternoon, looking more dead than alive,



and went to bed, telling his mother to send at once for the family doctor, for that he had thrown up a very important case for which he was retained, knowing that he was in for a serious illness.

His prognostics were right. He was desperately ill with typhoid fever, and for many days it was uncertain whether he would live or die.

At length, however, a naturally strong constitution pulled him through, and to Mrs. Roscoe's most unspeakable thankfulness, he was pronounced to be out of danger.

The poor woman had been half distracted during the worst part of his illness. He was her only child—her pride, her joy, her delight—and if she lost him, she lost indeed, her all! As she sat by his bedside during the long watches of the night, through those first days of high fever and delirium—as she listened to the rapid, incoherent words that poured in a meaningless torrent from his lips—words that dwelt ever upon his lost happiness—upon Nell, who was so dear and yet so false—Nell, whom he addressed in the fondest accents of love, or upbraided in terms of wildest reproach—Nell, whom he alternately blessed and implored to come to him, or cursed and reviled with foul and violent words—the poor mother grew to understand that it was this woman who, for good or ill, had reigned supreme in her son's heart, and whose loss had brought him to the very brink of the grave.

"He might have married her ten times over, sooner than that I should lose him altogether," she sobbed broken-heartedly to her sister-in-law, during those dark days when his life hung in the balance. Yet, even then, Mrs. Torrens had replied hardly and unsympathetically:

"My dear, that is sheer weakness on your part! It is far better that his body should perish than that his soul should be lost altogether, as it would undoubtedly have been had he thrown himself away upon that bad creature; and how bad she must have been, we can judge now from the poor fellow's delirious wanderings. That story we heard about her, you see, was perfectly true."

For thus much had Cecil unconsciously betrayed to the watchers by his sick bed.

At length the worst was over; the fever was spent and left him, and there was only the weakness of convalescence to contend with.

The summer was now far advanced, and the season was one of unusual drought and heat.

"As soon as he can travel, he must go away," said the doctors who had attended him through his illness. "We must get him away. There must be no return to work for months; he must have bracing mountain air and perfect rest, as soon as he is well enough to be moved."

It was decided that he should go, travelling by easy stages, to a mountain health-resort in Switzerland. Mrs. Roscoe, of course, was to accompany him. Cecil was pleased with the idea; he longed to get away, to change the stifling atmosphere of London for the snow-laden breezes of the Alps, to get rid of the irksome restraints of the sick room and to shake off the habits of the invalid.

He clung to his mother much in these days of weakness. He had always been a good son to her, and her unwearying devotion to him during his illness drew him nearer to her than ever.

"It will be heavenly," he said to her, "only, darling mother, let it be just you and I, and no one else! For pity's sake, don't let us have Aunt Torrens with us. I shall be ill again if she comes; in fact, I declare that I won't go at all, unless you can get rid of her."

And Mrs. Roscoe was finally obliged to break this unpalatable declaration to her sister-in-law.

She wrapped it up as carefully and as politely as she could, but, do as she would, there was no disguising the fact, that Cecil refused to go, if his aunt was to go too.

Mrs. Torrens, who had set her heart on the trip abroad, was deeply hurt and offended; and there ensued a quarrel between the two ladies, the like of which, for bitterness and anger, had never taken place before.

Mrs. Roscoe retired to her son's room, dissolved in tears.

"She will never forgive us," she said sobbingly to him. "She is perfectly furious; she wouldn't believe it at first, and then when she understood that you really wished to go with me only, and did not want her at all, her rage was simply fearful. She has threatened to leave us altogether, Cecil."

"And a good job, too," replied Cecil heartlessly. "Why she ever came to live with us at all, I never can imagine. I am sure we don't want her."

"But remember her money, my dearest boy. Her money, which I always hoped and believed that she would leave to you."

"I can do without it, very well. I neither want Aunt Torrens, nor her dirty money either; you can tell her so."

"Oh! it is very foolish of you to say that, Cecil, for money is always a blessing, no matter from what source it comes. But alas—alas, she has already mentioned the names of those wretched little Torrens children, her husband's nephews, you know, whom I hoped she had quite forgotten. She said just now that she felt she had been unjust to them, and that she should alter her will and leave everything to them."

"Well, let her! I am sure I don't care! So long as she doesn't come with us to Switzerland, she may do any other d——d thing she pleases," he cried recklessly.

And it was after this rent in the family peace and harmony that it occurred to Mrs. Roscoe that it might be possible to take with them abroad another companion, in whose society she deemed that it would be altogether wise and desirable that her son should be thrown.

Cecil raised no objections whatever to this idea.

"Oh! by all means take little Ida, if you like, mother dear. I daresay it will be pleasanter for you to have another lady with you, and Ida is one of those people who does not rub one the wrong way; she does not, it is true, excite one particularly but then, on the other hand, she is perfectly inoffensive."

This was not, perhaps, very encouraging, but Mrs. Roscoe was thankful for small mercies, and required no more than his permission to set her little scheme in motion.

Ida was of course only too delighted to go with her friend and her son, and never assuredly did a little party of three set off from Charing Cross in better spirits, and in better harmony with one another, than did these three people, on a certain balmy morning early in July.

The Alps and their keen health-giving breezes did their duty by Cecil Roscoe. Very soon he had ceased to be an invalid; in an incredibly short time he shook off his invalid habits, the tonics and the medicines were thrown to the winds, and an alpenstock became his daily companion in their stead. The love of climbing grew upon him with his growing strength, and that passion to get up, and to see over, which becomes a craving to

those who imbibe the true spirit of mountain scenery, began to possess him with a new and hitherto untasted delight.

What a joy it was to rise before the rest of the sleeping world was awake, to breakfast hurriedly on dry rolls and milk, and to set off in the cold, grey chill of the dawning day; and then to climb and climb for long hours, by steep and stony paths that wound amongst the stillness of the dusky pine forests; to watch the rising sun as it flushed one after the other the white bosoms of the long mountain range into golden glory, whilst the pale blue mists in the deep dark valleys below, rose and dispersed themselves under the warmth of the crimson morning. And then, what a rapture in the keen flower-scented air, up there, upon those dizzy heights of cliff and upland meadow! How delicious to lie upon beds of gentian and of wild thyme, to gather great bunches of crimson Alpine roses, to listen to the faint musical tinkle of the goat bells, and to count the little brown *châlets* dotted far below amongst the emerald green pastures. And then to turn once more to the solemn grandeur of those eternal mountains opposite, rent with dazzling glaciers from summit to base, and wonderful always with the impenetrable mysteries of the long long ages of creation.

Cecil grew to love those morning rambles amongst the Alpine solitudes—solitudes that lay far above the busy world below and that were steeped in the ineffable peace and sweetness which hovers betwixt the mountain tops and the sky.

Naturally enough, it was not Mrs. Roscoe who was his companion upon those wanderings amongst the mountains and forests and valleys. Yet he was hardly ever alone. Almost always Ida was up and dressed in time to be his companion. Clad in her neat costume of homespun, with strong boots upon her feet and a wide straw hat upon her head, he would find her awaiting him in the hall of the hotel at the appointed hour; always eager and keen to try some new route, and full of sympathy with any mood in which he happened to find himself. And Ida was at her best again in these days; hope, and the constant companionship of the man she loved, rendered her gentle and amiable, and all those evil ingredients within her, of hate and envy and malice, retreated once more into the background, under the softening influences of this happy change in her fate.

She was not at all a clever or lively companion, but perhaps that was all the more in her favour, for it is not clever men who are the most attracted by clever women, in point of fact, they more usually—perhaps by the force of contrast—prefer the fools.

Ida was not exactly a fool—far from it; but she was by no means intellectual, and the poetical element, which should exist in every cultured mind, was entirely left out of her. But she was practical and sensible, and she had wit enough at all events to be silent upon subjects she knew nothing about. It did not, in fact, occur to Cecil to lay bare his thoughts or his opinions to her, for he knew by experience that she only echoed everything he said with a parrot-like servility, and he did not want the trouble of making conversation. Yet he would have been hardly human had he remained long in ignorance of her absolute devotion to him. It was soon as plain as daylight that she worshipped him as a superior being, and such worship was just at the present juncture eminently soothing and grateful to him and to his wounded vanity.

The weeks slipped away; the weather remained perfect. Sometimes his mother joined them in prolonged excursions by steamer across the deep blue waters of a placid lake that lay many hundred feet below their hotel, or sometimes they took a carriage, and all three drove downwards amongst the pine woods to a secluded town that lay in the valley beyond; but always, and on every occasion, Ida was at Cecil's side.

And then one day an accident brought matters to a climax—an accident, without which it is possible that Cecil might have gone on to the end of the chapter without understanding the meaning of the situation into which he had drifted.

One afternoon, Ida—whether by chance or on purpose is a matter that has never been altogether cleared up—slipped and nearly fell, in coming down a very steep path. She declared that she was in great pain, and that she must have twisted or sprained her ankle. At any rate, she was apparently unable to walk alone, and there was nothing else for Cecil to do but to assist her as best he could down the steep descent.

They were fortunately at a very short distance from the hotel, and it was Mrs. Roscoe's custom to come out to meet them to a certain point amongst the woods that was within the limits of

her walking powers, there to await their return from their expeditions. They had not gone far before they caught sight of her waiting and looking out for them in the usual place, seated upon a bench under a wide-spreading pine tree from which there was a lovely view of the lake and mountains.

Mrs. Roscoe suddenly heard her son's voice, and looking up she saw something that made her heart leap up within her with joy and satisfaction. The young people came into sight round the corner of the path in an entirely unusual fashion. For Cecil's arm was round Ida's waist, and she was apparently leaning with affectionate familiarity upon his shoulder.

Such a sight, not unnaturally, suggested but one solution to Mrs. Roscoe's mind. She rose and rushed hastily forwards, and before Cecil realized what she was about to do, she enfolded them both in a motherly embrace.

"My dearest, dearest children!" she cried excitedly. "Now, indeed, I am a happy woman! for the wish of my heart is realized at last. Kiss me, my darling boy—and you too, my dearest Ida, dear daughter of my heart and choice."

"Mother!" cried Cecil sharply, and he shook Ida off from him almost roughly. "Explain to my mother, Ida, what has happened," he said, turning to her. But to his confusion and dismay, Ida made no answer; her face was crimson with blushes, her eyes were lowered, her lips trembled, her injured foot seemed to hurt her no longer—or perhaps she had forgotten it, for she stood upon it now quite easily; and then, for all answer, she suddenly threw her arms round Mrs. Roscoe's neck and burst into tears.

Cecil stood for a moment looking on awkwardly enough, then the truth began to come home to him—his mother had taken them for lovers.

"Ida has sprained her foot," he murmured confusedly and somewhat foolishly. "I—I was helping her——"

"Of course, of course, my dear—and this little accident has brought everything right between you! You need not explain, I see it all, and I have guessed your secret long ago, my dearest Ida; I know that you have loved Cecil for years, almost as dearly as his old mother does!" She assisted the girl tenderly to the seat from which she had just arisen, and Ida hid her burning cheeks on his mother's breast.

Cecil came and stood before them both.



"Is that so, Ida?" he asked gravely. "Do you indeed love me?"

And then, partly because of her tears which distressed him, and partly because really he saw no way of retiring gracefully and with dignity from the position into which between them, he had been forced, and also partly too because this mute confession of a love he had not sought was really very flattering to his bruised *amour propre*, the young man took Ida's hand in his and kissed it.

"If you love me, I ought to be a very happy man," he said.

And it was in this strange manner that the engagement so long and so ardently desired by Mrs. Roscoe had come about.

(To be concluded.)

## The Crusades.

By CHARLOTTE A. PRICE.

### PART III.

WE must now give some account of the military and religious orders which were formed in the interval of the first and second Crusades. The Knights of St. John rank first. Godfrey enriched their hospital by the gift of an estate in Brabant, and many of his companions devoted themselves to the perpetual service of the wayworn pilgrims who visited Jerusalem. So self-denying were the administrators of this charity that the bread which they ate was made from the coarsest flour mixed with bran, while that which was given to the sick was formed from the purest meal. Gerard, the abbot, feeling the weight of this charge, proposed to his brethren to renounce the world and to take a religious habit. The Patriarch of Jerusalem accepted their vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, and invested them with a plain black robe, having a white linen cross of eight points on the left breast. While the brethren were engaged in military duties they wore over their clothes a red military cassock with a white cross.

The Hospitallers were divided into three classes—nobility, clergy and serving brothers. In the time of Raymond du Puy, the friars first became soldiers. Like all other cavaliers, they were taught that the greatest service which they could render to the Christian world was to sacrifice their lives in battle with the infidels; but he who deserted the ranks, or sent, or accepted a challenge to a private combat, was deprived of the habit and cross of the order. When not engaged in war, the various duties of the hospital occupied the knights, and great men sent their sons to the preceptories to be trained in knightly discipline and feats of arms.

Another order that soon rose into power and dignity at this time was that of the Red Cross Knights, or the Templars, so called because Baldwin I. gave them for a residence part of the royal palace adjacent to the Temple of Solomon. The members

bound themselves to the three great monastic vows of chastity, community of possessions and absolute submission to the commands of the order. The candidates were warned of the hardships they would have to suffer, but that did not deter them from joining the ranks of this fraternity. A Templar must rise when he wished to sleep; he must endure fatigue when he required repose; he must suffer hunger and thirst when he would rather eat and drink; and he must go into one country when he was anxious to remain in another. Like their compeers of St. John, the new friars added military duties to their religious character. They received from Pope Honorius a white mantle without a cross as their regular habit. Pope Eugenius III. commanded them to wear red crosses, and they were taught that the white garment was symbolical of the purity of their lives and professions, and the red crosses were emblematical of the martyrdom which they would willingly undergo in defending the Holy Land from the attacks of the Mohammedans.

In opposition to the practice of most religious orders, the Templars wore long beards; they also wore linen coifs and red caps close over them; shirts and stockings of twisted mail, a sopra vest, and broad belts with swords inserted. Over the whole was a white cloak touching the ground. A Templar somewhat resembled in appearance Spenser's Red-Cross Knight:

"And on his breast a bloodie cross he bore,  
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,  
For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore,  
And dead, as living ever, him ador'd;  
Upon his shield the like was also scor'd,  
For soveraine hope, which in his helpe he had.  
Right, faithful, true he was in deede and word."

In memory of their primitive poverty, and in order that they might be mindful of humility, Hugh and Godfrey had engraven on their seal the figures of two men on one horse. A rude cut of this seal is in the "*Historia Minor*," of Matthew Paris. It does not appear how long this singular stamp was used by the Templars. In the course of time it was changed for a device of a field argent, charged with a cross gules, and upon the nombril thereof a holy lamb, with its nimbus and banner.

In England, when lawyers became Templars, this device was

assumed by the Society of the Middle Temple, about fifty years after the figure of Pegasus had been taken by the Society of the Inner Temple.

Christian charity also founded the Order of St. Lazarus, and in 370, St. Basil built a large hospital in the suburbs of Cesarea, and lepers were the peculiar objects of its care. One of these hospitals was in existence at Jerusalem at the time of the first Crusade. It was a religious order, as well as a charitable institution, and followed the rule of St. Augustine. For purposes of defence against the Turks, the members of the society became soldiers, and insensibly they formed themselves into distinct bodies of those who attended the sick, and those who mingled with the world. The cure of lepers was their first object, and they not only received lepers into their order, for the benefit of charity, but their grand master was always to be a man who was afflicted with the disorder. St. Lazarus became their tutelar saint, and the buildings were styled Lazarettos. The habit of these knights is not known; it only appears that the crosses on their breasts were always green, in opposition to those of St. John, which were white, and the red crosses of the Templars. Neither the names, nor the exploits of the Knights of St. Lazarus often appear in the history of the Crusades.

Louis VII., King of France, was the first sovereign prince who fought under the banner of the cross. His resolution to join the second Crusade was quickened by the eloquence of St. Bernard, the great oracle of the age. This new apostle of a holy war was far more capable than Peter the Hermit of exciting religious emotion. At the age of twenty-three he embraced the monastic life, and soon afterwards founded the monastery of Clairvaux, in Champagne. Genuine fanaticism only could have followed a man who sternly told his admirers that if they wished to enter his convent, they must dismiss their bodies, for their souls alone could dwell in a place which was sacred to contemplation and devotion. St. Bernard exposed the corruption and licentiousness of the bishops and monks of his time, and his self-denial and earnestness for religion gained him the reverence of his contemporaries.

In a Parliament held at Vezelai, 1146, Louis was confirmed in his pious resolve, and he joined with Bernard in persuading the barons and knights to save the sanctuary of David from the hands

of the Philistines. No house could contain the assembled multitude; the crosses which Bernard brought with him to the meeting fell far short of the number required; and he therefore tore his simple monkish garments into small pieces, and affixed them to the shoulders of his kneeling converts.

The German emperor, Conrad III., was also won over to the cause by the eloquence of Bernard. Besides many French and German nobles, some of the English nobility, restless when not engaged in deeds of blood, joined themselves to the Crusading forces. A considerable troop of women rode among the Germans; they were arrayed with the spear and shield, but some love of pleasure had mingled itself with the desire of renown, for they were remarkable from the splendour of their dress, and their bold leader was called "the golden-footed dame." The ladies of the twelfth century did not merely thread pearls, and amuse themselves with other employments equally delicate and elegant. The sword, and not the tongue only, decided their disputes. The love of "brave gestes" was the passion of the ladies as well as of the knights of chivalry.

The allied armies suffered terrible privations and performed prodigies of valour on their march to the Holy Land, and the life of the French king was saved more by good fortune than skill. Thousands of the Crusaders perished without seeing Jerusalem. No doubt their loss was compensated to them by the glory of martyrdom.

In March, 1148, the French king arrived at Antioch, accompanied by his queen, Eleanor, who, devoted to gallantry and pleasure, vainly tried to dissuade him from proceeding farther on his journey. No blandishments, however, could move Louis from his purpose of marching into Palestine. He repaired to Jerusalem, entered it in religious procession, while crowds of clergy and laymen were singing the Psalm, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." His arrival had been preceded by that of the Emperor of Germany and the Dukes of Saxony and Bavaria.

Although the re-capture of Edessa was the great object of this crusade, yet there were other cities in Syria far more dangerous to the security of Jerusalem than that remote place. The decree was therefore passed to lay siege to Damascus. Numerous, and of long continuance, were the engagements between the Latins and the Syrians, but though the Crusaders fought with their

wanted bravery, their efforts were unsuccessful; they were obliged to raise the siege and retire to Jerusalem in sorrow and shame.

Conrad now returned to Europe, and his steps were a year afterwards traced by the French king, the queen, and most of the French lords.

The siege and capture of the strong and important city of Ascalon now took place by the Christians, and for the next eight years, the remainder of the reign of Baldwin III., Palestine was seldom free from the miseries of war. Baldwin had many of the accomplishments of chivalry, and his death was much deplored. When his foe, Noureddin, was advised to seize the moment of universal distress at Baldwin's death, to invade Palestine, the generous Turk replied, "God forbid that I should take advantage of the Christians' misfortune. Now that Baldwin is dead, who is there that I need fear?" Baldwin having died childless, his brother Almeric, Prince of Jaffa and Ascalon, succeeded to the throne. Six months afterwards he commenced a war with the Egyptians. The progress of the Christians in Egypt was only stopped by the measure which was always ruinous to the natives, of breaking down the banks of the Nile and overflowing the country. The political feuds in Cairo were favourable to hostile inroads. The power of the Fatimite Caliphs had been usurped by their ministers, who dared to take the name and enjoy the prerogatives of the Sultan. While the viziers commanded the armies and swayed the government, the Caliph was shut up in the mosque or in the seraglio, a devotee or a sybarite.

At the time of the Christian invasion, the grand vizier, Shower, who had been a slave, was deposed by a soldier named Dargham, and the unfortunate prince fled the court of Noureddin. The Turks had long wished to destroy the government and religion of Egypt. Among the generals of Noureddin were Shiracouch and his nephew Saladin, men of the pastoral tribe of the Kurds, a ferocious and hardy race. These valiant leaders of the Syrian force were sent into Egypt. In apprehension of their coming, Dargham had despatched ambassadors to the Franks, with splendid offers of tribute, if they would give him succour. But before the treaty was concluded, Dargham was vanquished and slain by Shiracouch. Shower had entered Cairo, and had been reinvested in his dignities. The Turks and the Franks contended in many battles for the lordship of Egypt. In the victory of the



former, Bohemond and Raymond, the young princes of Antioch and Tripoli, were taken prisoners ; but at last a treaty was made between Almeric and Shiracouch, by which the Christians bound themselves to quit Egypt, and they finally left that country in 1169.

During this time Saladin rose into power. Adhed named him grand vizier, and he was so bountiful and judicious in the distribution of the treasures, which as chief minister he commanded, that he laid the foundation of permanent power. When his designs to render himself independent became visible to Nouredin, he resolved to go into Egypt and take the reins of government. But he was taken ill with a quinsy and died at Damascus. Though the greatest Mussulman prince of his age, his virtues were celebrated by his own people and the Christians also. He was as simple in his dress as the meanest peasant. In his reign the laws were so well administered that Damascus was crowded with strangers. The public revenues were never distributed except in the presence of the doctors of the law ; and so small a portion did he reserve for the support of his dignity that his queen complained of his parsimony. But he replied, "I fear God, and am no more than the treasurer of the Moslems. Their property I cannot alienate, but I still possess three shops in the City of Hems ; these you may take, and these alone I can bestow." In every part of his dominion he built mosques and hospitals and places of refreshment for travellers.

Almeric died in July, 1173, at the age of thirty-eight. He was cold, selfish, mean and degenerate. By his marriage with Agnes de Courtenay, he had one son, Baldwin IV., the seventh monarch of Jerusalem, a leper, who found that his disease prevented him from performing his duties, and, therefore, he committed the government to a French cavalier, named Guy de Lusignan, who had married Sybilla, daughter of Almeric, and widow of a lord of the Montferrat family. But the regent had neither talents nor courage for the difficult office, and the king, by a new Act, gave the crown to the infant son of Sybilla. Baldwin died within three years after this disposition of his kingdom had been made, and the infant sovereign quickly followed him to the grave. The country was filled with civil strife, and Sybilla and her husband, Guy de Lusignan, became king and queen of Jerusalem.

At this period the power of Saladin had attained its height, and the hour was come when he resolved upon the destruction of the Christians. By the reputation of his talents and military virtues, by policy, by artifice, and also by the dagger—for in those days people saw what was passing and kept silence—by all these means Saladin became lord of Syria and Egypt; the names of the sons of Nouredin were obliterated from the coins of the realm and the books of the mosque. In Saladin's rise to supreme power he was often obliged to check his hatred of the Christians, and though the wars between him and the Franks in this reign are not worthy of detail, yet one circumstance may be mentioned. A few hundred of the knights of the military orders fearlessly attacked some thousand Moslems. Only two or three of the valiant band survived the battle. The bravery of the troop was so heroic as to receive the admiration of the enemy. Some of the knights, after having lost their swords, threw themselves on the foe and fought with their fists; others drew the arrows from their bodies and hurled them at the enemy. One of the Templars, named James de Maille, mounted on a white horse, fought so nobly that the Saracens called him St. George, and after the battle they hung over him with respect as he lay dead, and even drank his blood, thinking that they could thereby acquire his courage.

In July, 1187, the battle of Tiberias was fought, resulting in the total defeat of the Latins. They who fell in the field were few in number when compared with those who were slain in flight or were hurled from the precipices. The fragment of holy wood was taken from the hands of the Bishop of Acre; the King, the Master of the Templars and the Marquess of Montferrat were captured. In the time of the Crusades, clemency to the vanquished was not the virtue of the Christians, and it has in no age been the quality of the Moslems. On this occasion Saladin showed his savage cruelty to its fullest extent; death, or conversion to Islamism, was the only choice he offered to such of the knights as had been made prisoners. The bravery of the cavaliers equalled their religious convictions, and all of them showed by their manner of dying, the sincerity of their faith. Saladin presented a cup of cold water to Lusignan, and by that act of hospitality assured him of his life.

Jerusalem became the refuge for such of the Christians as had

escaped the sword or chains of the Turks. One hundred thousand people are said to have been in the place ; but so few were the soldiers, and so feeble was the government of the Queen, that the Holy City was almost defenceless. Saladin declared his unwillingness to stain with human blood a spot which even the Turks held in reverence, as having been sanctified by the presence of many of God's messengers. He offered the people, on condition of the surrender of the city, money and settlements in Syria ; but the Christians declared that they would not resign to the infidels the place where the Saviour had died. Saladin was indignant at this rejection of his kindness, and swore to enter the place sword in hand and retaliate the dreadful carnage which the Franks had made in the days of Godfrey de Bouillon. The generals organized their forces and put arms into the hands of the citizens. So great was the enthusiasm that the clergy contributed the golden ornaments of the churches, which were all carried to the mint and converted into money. During fourteen days there were various engagements, but the Christians, though brave to desperation, could never destroy the military engines of Saladin, and after prolonged fighting they resolved to trust to the generosity of their conqueror, who stipulated that the soldiers and nobles should be escorted to Tyre and that the Latin population should become slaves, if they were not ransomed, at the rate of ten crowns of gold for a man, five for a woman and one for a child.

After four days had been consumed by the unhappy inhabitants in weeping over and embracing the Holy Sepulchre and other sacred places, the Latins left the city and passed through the enemy's camp. In solemn procession, the clergy, the Queen and her retinue of ladies followed. Saladin advanced to meet them as they approached him with supplications. "Our fortunes and possessions," they said, "you may freely enjoy ; but restore to us our fathers, our husbands and our brothers. With these dear objects we cannot be entirely miserable, and that God whom we reverence, and who provides for the birds of the air, will not forget our children."

Saladin immediately released all the prisoners whom the women requested him to pardon, and loaded them with presents. This action was not the consequence of a transient feeling of pity, for when he entered Jerusalem and heard of the tender care with

which the Knights of St. John treated the sick, he allowed ten of the order to remain in their hospital till they could complete their work of humanity. The infidels were once more established in the Holy City. The great cross was taken down from the Church of the Sepulchre and for two days dragged through the mire of the streets. The bells of the churches were melted, and the floors and walls of the Mosque of Omar were purified with Damascene rose-water. Ascalon, Laodicea, Gabela, Sidon, Nazareth, Bethlehem, all those places fell when their great support was gone, and Tyre was almost the only town of consequence which remained to the Christians. Saladin carried his conquering army into the principality of Antioch; five-and-twenty towns submitted, and Antioch itself became tributary to the Mussulmans.

In the eighty-eight years that the Crusaders possessed Jerusalem peace seldom dwelt about her walls. States which are formed by arms, not by policy, are as quick in their rise as rapid in their decay, and ruin and disorder are the offshoots of ambition. In strength of body and personal and military prowess the Turks and the Franks were equal; but the Turks were numerous and the Franks few, and as the twelfth century was an age of war rather than of policy, the Latins did not by intellectual superiority raise themselves above their enemies. The Christians scrupled not to break faith with the Mohammedans; they never attempted to conciliate the foe or to live on terms of liberal intercourse. Indeed, it was impossible for the Turks to have any respect for the Christians, who were not only cruel invaders and sanguinary persecutors, but common robbers.

The early writers accounted for the evanescence of the Crusaders' prosperity in Palestine by the supposition that the wrath of heaven visited their crimes. They were so enormous that a description of them would appear more like a satire than a history. It is affirmed that the clergy were as depraved as the laity, and that there was not one chaste woman in Palestine. Yet the Holy Sepulchre was redeemed by the valour of the first Crusaders, and it was the want of union rather than moral virtue that accelerated the ruin of the Christian kingdom, and particularly the jealousy between the two chief military orders. These warriors were the flower of Christendom, but in the course of time the fine spirit of their institutions became mingled with worldly views, and a noble emulation in strife and war degenerated

into personal malice and hatred, ambition and avarice, and, therefore, dissatisfaction slept in the thin ashes of a seeming friendship.

After the first conquest of the Holy Land, individuals and parties of people continually went thither from Europe. There were vessels of conveyance at most seaports, bearing on their prows a flag with a red cross upon it. From motives of safety the ships commonly sailed in fleets, and for general convenience two periods of sailing were fixed—March and June. The summer passage was preferred, for the Archbishop of Tyre speaks of the autumn as the time when pilgrims reached Jerusalem.

King Louis VII., of France, always cherished the hope of returning to the Holy Land and of reviving his faded glory, and at length he found his wishes met by a brother sovereign. Henry II., of England, in the height of his disputes with Thomas à Becket, had professed great sanctity, and among the deeds of virtue which washed from his mind the guilt of Becket's murder was the supporting of two hundred Knights Templars in Palestine for a year, and an agreement with the Pope to go and fight the infidels in Asia or Spain for thrice that time, if his Holiness should require it. In the year 1177, Henry and Louis agreed to travel together to the Holy Land; but the subsequent death of the French monarch terminated the project.

However, it was in the reign of Henry II. that the third Crusade was preached; thousands of men answered the call, and the holy theme was revered in every part of the English dominions. The cross-legged figures on sepulchral monuments date from the reign of Stephen. The fashion survived the holy wars for some years. It has been supposed that they were not only of people who went to Palestine as soldiers or pilgrims, but of those who vowed to go, or who contributed to the expense of the Crusaders. This supposition is in some degree warranted by the fact that there are instances of women in this singular posture on monumental remains.

The German emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, and the Count of Flanders agreed to join Henry of England in undertaking a journey to Palestine, but none of the principles which originally caused the Crusades influenced the actions of these monarchs. They were inspired only with a passion for fame, and burned for revenge on the impious Saracens. The noise of merriment

ceased in the hospitable halls of the barons, and the troubadours, the Provençal bards, sang the duties of chivalry. It was agreed that the French Crusaders should wear red crosses, the English white ones, and the Flemish green. By universal consent, a tax similar everywhere in name and in nature was imposed on those who would not be crossed. This imposition was called the Saladin tithe, and was to last for one year. But Henry II. never saw the Holy City, for mental agony at the ingratitude and rebellion of his sons brought on his death.

His valiant son, Richard Cœur de Lion, had more of the warlike spirit than of the religious feelings of the age. So eager was he to equip a large military force that he sold the crown lands, and renounced, for a large sum of money, the claims of England on the allegiance of Scotland. Richard crossed the Channel in December, 1189, and met the King of France; they joined their forces at Vezelai, and the number was computed at one hundred thousand.

Richard made some singular laws for regulating the conduct of the pilgrims in their passage by sea. Murder was to be punished by casting into the water the deceased person, with the murderer tied to him. He that drew his sword in anger should lose his hand. If a man gave another a blow, he was to be thrice immersed; an ounce of silver was the penalty for using opprobrious language. A thief was to have boiling pitch and feathers put upon his head, and was to be set on shore at the first opportunity.

The purse of a royal or noble pilgrim used to be magnificently adorned with golden ornaments, and also with heraldic devices; not only of the owner's family, but of every person with whom he was in any wise connected.

Sicily was fixed upon as the rendezvous of the two kings, and during Richard's sojourn there he was married to the Princess Berengaria of Navarre, to whom he had been long affianced.

In the month of March, 1191, the French king left Sicily and sailed to Acre, and about a fortnight after his departure the English monarch also set sail for that place. It is conjectured that his soldiers, horses and stores filled two hundred ships of various sizes. On his way to the East he subjugated Cyprus, and stayed there for some weeks, but at last he arrived safely



before the walls of Acre, where he was warmly welcomed by all the Europeans gathered there.

The German emperor, Barbarossa, marched with prudence and humanity through the hostile countries, but he was not fated to see the Holy City, for he died from the effects of a shock to his system, caused by bathing in the small river of the Calycadnus. He was drawn out almost lifeless, and expired shortly afterwards, at the age of seventy. His son, the Duke of Suabia, who was a brave and experienced general, took the command of the troops, which were, however, reduced to a tenth of their original number when they arrived at Acre. Importance was given to the German soldiers by the formation of a new order of knighthood, called the Order of the Teutonic Knights of St. Mary in Jerusalem. Their dress was a white mantle with a black cross, embroidered with gold. James de Vitry says, "It pleased God to create this third order, because a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

Acre had opened its gates to the conqueror a few days after the fall of Tiberias, and that city, by reason of its situation and magnitude, was worthy of the bravest efforts of its former lords to regain. When Richard reached the Holy Land, the siege of Acre had lasted twenty-two months. So perfect was the self-security of Saladin that he did not attempt to overwhelm his foes; and when he at length came to the relief of the city, the force of the King of Jerusalem was appallingly numerous. Lusignan was at one time the commander of one hundred thousand soldiers. In the last year of the siege, the deaths by famine exceeded the destruction which former battles had wrought; while the morals of the Crusaders were as depraved as their condition was miserable. Dissensions arose between the French and English monarchs, and bitter feelings of envy and jealousy tore the two armies asunder. King Richard, being ill, was carried to his military engines on a mattress, and there are instances also recounted of Saladin's martial spirit rising victorious over bodily pain; particularly on one occasion, when he formed his troops in battle array, and rode about the field from morning to night, though his legs were covered with boils, and it was thought that he could only recline. After a siege of two years, the citizens of Acre wrung a reluctant consent from Saladin to capitulate, and so the two kings entered the city, and their

banners floated on the walls. The English king generously surrendered the island of Cyprus to Lusignan, and confirmed him in his title of Lord of Palestine.

Philip Augustus returned to France, after swearing not to make war upon England during Cœur de Lion's absence; and the holy warriors left Acre and marched to Azotus. The safety of the Crusaders was principally owing to the indissoluble firmness of their columns and their resolute forbearance. Each man was covered with pieces of cloth, united together by rings, on which he received without injury the enemy's arrows. Boliadin, who narrates this curious circumstance, says, "that he himself saw several of the soldiers who had not one or two, but ten arrows adhering to their backs, and yet they marched forward with a quiet step and without trepidation. So close did they march, that if an apple had been thrown, it must have struck either a man or a horse."

At Azotus Richard defeated Saladin, and after performing prodigies of valour, he arrived at Ascalon. He was dissuaded from attacking Jerusalem, by the argument that, even if it should be taken, he would have to fight immediately with the Turks in the neighbourhood, and that as soon as the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre was attained, the soldiers would return to Europe, and leave the Holy Land to its fate. Political disturbances in England now demanded the presence of the king, and he was compelled to solicit Saladin to terminate the war. He declared that he only desired the possession of Jerusalem and of the true cross. But Saladin replied that the sacred city was as dear to the Moslems as to the Christians, and that he would never be guilty of conniving at idolatry, by permitting the worship of a piece of wood.

Richard then proceeded on his way to Jerusalem, but when he drew near to the city he found that the Turks had destroyed all the cisterns within two miles of the place; the heat of summer had begun, and, therefore, as a general, being fully aware of the impolicy of advancing to the siege, he abandoned the enterprise. All his proud hopes were now defeated. A friend led him to a hill which commanded a view of Jerusalem; but, covering his face with his shield, he declared that he was not worthy to behold a city which he could not conquer.

After many battles and much bloodshed, at last peace was made

between Saladin and Richard, and as the former avowed his contempt for the vulgar obligation of oaths, they only grasped each other's hands in pledge of fidelity. A truce was agreed upon for three years and eight months. Through the whole of the war Saladin and Richard emulated each other as much in kindly deeds of courtesy as in warlike exploits. If ever the King of England chanced to be ill, his generous foe sent him presents of Damascene pears, peaches and other fruits. The same liberal hand gave the luxury of snow in hot seasons; and it is said that Saladin received the honour of knighthood from a French cavalier. Saphadin, the brother of Saladin, so much admired the splendid achievements of Cœur de Lion that, at one time, seeing him dismounted in a battle, he sent him two horses as tokens of respect. The English army visited all the hallowed places in Jerusalem, and Saladin, alive to every obligation, prevented his subjects from injuring the persons and insulting the feelings of the devout palmers.

Richard having gained more honour in Palestine than any other emperor or king who had sought renown in foreign war, set sail for England in the month of October, 1192, with his queen, the English soldiers and pilgrims. But violent storms scattered his fleet; many of his vessels were wrecked on hostile shores, and he heard that the French lords had resolved to seize him if he landed in their territories; therefore, he purchased the maritime guidance of some pirates, who changed the course of his vessel from Marseilles to the Adriatic. His companions were Baldwin de Betun, a priest, Anselm the chaplain, and a few Knights Templars. They landed at Zara, and Richard sent a messenger to the governor of Goritia with a present of a ring and demanded passports. The governor inquired the names of the pilgrims. "One is called Baldwin de Betun," answered the man, "and the other Hugh the merchant." But the governor, being struck with the size and beauty of the ruby given to him, weighed the circumstances in his mind, and guessed that the donor could be no common person. He exclaimed, "The name of the owner of this ring is not Hugh the merchant, but King Richard; tell him, however, that although I have sworn to detain returning pilgrims, yet the magnificence of this gift, and the dignity of the donor, induce me to violate the rule, and to allow your master to pass."

Every Christian monarch was prepared to seize as a prisoner the great champion of the cross, therefore Richard and his friends took to their horses in the middle of the night, and speedily found themselves in Germany. From that country he was entreated to fly, by a Norman knight, who recognized him, and after travelling for three days and three nights, he arrived at a town near Vienna, accompanied only by William de Stagno and a boy who understood the German language.

An old author says, "The King being weak and ill entered a house of public entertainment, and in order that no suspicion might be excited concerning his rank, he busied himself in turning the spit. He forgot, however, to conceal a splendid ring which he wore upon his finger. A man who had known his person at Acre recognized him, and gave the news to the Duke of Austria. His soldiers immediately surrounded the house, and the King, knowing the fruitlessness of resistance, offered to resign his sword. The duke advanced and received it, but it was soon apparent that Plantagenet was a prisoner, and not his guest, and some months afterwards the duke sold him to the Emperor of Germany."

Henry VI. removed him to a castle in the Tyrol, which was so strong that no one had ever escaped from it. Armed men were always present in the chamber of Richard and he was never allowed to speak in private to any of his companions. "A whole year elapsed before the English knew where their monarch was confined. Blondell de Nesle, Richard's favourite French minstrel, resolved to find out his lord; and after travelling many days without success, at last came to a castle where Richard was detained. Here he found that the castle belonged to the Duke of Austria, and that a king was there imprisoned. Suspecting that the prisoner was his master, he found means to place himself directly before the window of the chamber where the King was kept; and in this situation began to sing a French *chanson* which Richard and Blondell had formerly written together. When the King heard the song he knew it was Blondell who sung it; and when Blondell paused after the first half of the song, the King began the other half and completed it. Blondell then returned to England, acquainted the people with his discovery, and Richard was in due time liberated."

The following are the words of this celebrated song :

*Blondell.*—Donna, vostra beaumas,  
Elas bellas faisos ;  
Els bells oils amoros  
Els gens cors ben taillats.  
Dons sieu empresenats  
De vostra amor qui mi lin.

Your beauty, lady fair,  
None views without delight ;  
But still so cold an air  
No passion can excite.  
Yet this I patient see  
While all are shunn'd like me.

*Richard.*—Si bel trop affansia,  
Ja dei vos non portrai,  
Que major honorai  
Sol en votre deman ;  
Que sautra des beisan  
So can de vos volrai.

No nymph my heart can wound,  
If favours she divide,  
And smile on all around,  
Unwilling to decide ;  
I'd rather hatred bear  
Than love with others share.

Cœur de Lion was liberated on the payment by his English subjects of one hundred thousand marks of silver, and he returned to England in March, 1194.

No Asiatic monarch has filled so large a space in the eyes of Europe as the antagonist of Cœur de Lion. When Saladin died he was in the fifty-seventh year of his age ; during twenty-two years he had reigned over Egypt, and for nineteen years was absolute master of Syria. He was a compound of the dignity and the baseness, the greatness and the littleness of man. He had gained the throne through artifice and treachery ; but though ambitious he was not tyrannical ; he was the friend and dispenser of justice ; simple in manners and unostentatious in deportment. Three of his numerous progeny became sovereigns of Aleppo, Damascus and Egypt.

It was at this time that Pope Celestine III. sounded the call to arms, and issued orders to the archbishop and bishops of the Christian Church to persuade their congregations to unfurl the crimson standard, and march against the persecutors of the faith of Jesus Christ. France and England proved lukewarm in the cause, but Germany responded with ardour. The Emperor declared that he would provide a passage for both rich and poor who wished to go.

At first there were fair prospects of complete success ; but in their march from Tyre towards the Holy City, they made a fatal halt at the fortress of Thoron. The lofty and solid pile of stones withstood the attacks of the Crusaders ; but after a month's labour, the rock itself which supported the fortress was pierced through, and the battlements tottered to their foundation. The

Saracens sued for mercy, but the terms of the Christians were so revengeful that the former vowed to submit to the last extremity rather than trust to the oaths of the champions of the cross. Factions contentions disordered the Latin Council ; insubordination raged in the camp, and the German princes, seized with a panic, quitted their posts in the middle of the night. The camp was deserted, and the road to Tyre filled with soldiers and baggage. The Germans accused the Latins of cowardice ; and the barons of the Holy Land declared that they would not submit to the domineering pride of the Germans. Saphadin marched against them, and victory was on the side of the Christians ; but it was bought by the death of many brave warriors, particularly of the Duke of Saxony, the son of the Duke of Austria. News arrived from Europe that the great supporter of the Crusade, Henry VI., was dead. All the princes of any repute deserted the Holy Land, and while the Germans were celebrating the feast of St. Martin, the Moslems entered the city of Jaffa and slew every individual whom they found.

About this time, Henry, Count of Champagne, the acknowledged king of Jerusalem, died, and Almeric and Isabella were proclaimed king and queen of Jerusalem.

The third and fourth Crusades were created by the ordinary influence of papal power and royal authority ; but the fifth sprang from genuine fanaticism. At the close of the twelfth century a hero arose in France, worthy of comparison with St. Bernard. Fulk, of the town of Neuilly, near Paris, was distinguished by the fervour of his preaching, and, as in early life he had drained the cup of pleasure, he was well qualified to describe the different states of the sinner and the saint. He assumed the cross, and war with the infidels became the subject of his sermons. When the people saw that he bore the sanguinary badge, they thronged around him, and embraced with ardour the insignia of holy warriors ; the Pope also bestowed upon his efforts the apostolical benediction.

Innocent III. now occupied the papal chair, and he was the first pope who endeavoured to bring the fortunes as well as the consciences of men under the dominion of the Holy See. He followed the example of the kings of England and France, and imposed taxes on his subjects for the benefit of the Crusades ; but he went further still and included the clergy in these taxations, and this,



not for the benefit of Palestine, but to fill the coffers of Rome. His nuncios travelled through Europe preaching the holy cause, and the pardon and indulgences which they offered induced many men to become soldiers of God.

At a public tournament in Champagne, Thibaud III., the youthful Count of Blois and Chartres, resolved to exchange the picture of war for its reality. Reginald of Montmirail and Simon de Montfort, two of the noblest barons of France, and a proud corps of gentlemen, vowed to partake of the glory of their friends; and the people of the Netherlands did not want a leader, for Baldwin, *Count of Flanders, received the cross at Bruges*. By sad experience Europe had learned the horrors of a land journey to Palestine. The three leaders of this Crusade therefore determined to purchase the maritime aid of Venice. For this purpose they despatched an embassy to the Doge, requesting, upon any terms, the aid of ships and supplies in order to assist the barons of France in their endeavours to re-conquer Jerusalem. Arrangements were made by which, on the payment of eighty-five thousand marks of silver, the republic would furnish vessels, and provisions to last for one year, and would also become a principal in the war on condition that all acquisitions should be equally shared between the two allied nations.

Villehardouin returned to France with the welcome news of the conclusion of the treaty with the Venetians. Thibaud sprang from a bed of sickness, called for his war-horse, and declared his intention immediately to march. But he was weak from disease, and he expired in the act of distributing to his vassals the money which he had intended to expend upon the holy war. The command of the knights and men who had enlisted under his banner was accepted by Boniface, Marquess of Montferrat.

Shortly after Easter, in the year 1202, the French Crusaders assembled, and, after traversing France, they joined the Italian Crusaders under the Marquess of Montferrat, and finally arrived at Venice, where they were lodged in the Island of St. Nicholas. Fulk did not live to hear the issue of his exertions. He died while the French were at Venice, and was buried in the church of Neuilly.

After subjugating Zara under the leadership of the Doge, who, old and feeble as he was, put on the cross, the Crusaders occupied that city until the spring.

Constantinople was at this time the sister and rival of Rome, and the depository of all that was learned and artistic in the ancient world. But bad government, and the love of vice and luxury, so congenial to Asia, had weakened and rendered it effeminate, and its decline was almost coeval with its birth. The Emperor Alexius II. was murdered by his uncle Andronicus, and, under the specious pretext of revenging so unnatural an action, Isaac Angelus, a remote relation, took up arms, and seized the person of the regicide and had him beheaded. He then claimed the throne, which he occupied for two years, when, by a new revolution, he was torn from his imperial power and imprisoned, being also deprived of sight. The author of these enormities was his brother Alexius, a brother, too, whom he had redeemed from slavery. The son of the imprisoned emperor escaped, and sought refuge with Philip, Duke of Suabia, who had married his sister Irene. As he passed through Lombardy he met a few straggling pilgrims, who advised him to entreat the aid of the Crusaders; he did so, and they consented to his wishes, on condition that the Duke of Suabia would, in return, succour the cause of Palestine. Some impatient spirits clamoured against this proposed interruption to the great object of the Crusade, but the majority determined in favour of the alliance. It was in vain that the Pope prohibited the Crusaders from meddling with politics; the knights of France and Italy not only received his decrees with indifference and disdain, but the Venetians actually destroyed the walls, plundered the churches and houses of Zara, and divided the spoil with the French.

The young Prince Alexius arrived in Zara at Easter, 1203, and the army embarked and sailed for Corfu. Dread of papal anger mingled itself with personal fear and prudence. Many men noted for their power and rank deserted; amongst them was Simon de Montfort, who enlisted in the service of the King of Hungary; but he afterwards went to the Holy Land, and distinguished himself more by the splendour than the success of his arms.

## The Rise and Fall of Mrs. Brunt.

### I.

It was not true that Mrs. Brunt had, before matrimony, taken an active part in dispensing refreshments at a well-known railway station. Neither was there any foundation for the widely spread belief that she had captivated her present husband by the inimitably graceful manner in which she recommended various washes and perfumes at a fashionable hairdresser's establishment. If she could only have combined the experience gained in either of these careers with her manifold personal charms and her husband's reputation as a millionaire, she would unquestionably have proved a great social success. But the plain facts of the case were very different from what was usually conjectured, the truth being that Mrs. Brunt was hopelessly handicapped by a past of unimpeachable *bourgeois* respectability. This ultimately caused all the trouble.

As little Lydia Smith she had lived the quietest of lives with a widowed mother, meritoriously contriving to eke out their tiny income by much close application to plain needlework. In those days she was disturbed by no yearnings after the unattainable. The suburban terrace in which they lived, on the outskirts of a large country town, appeared to her an almost ideal residence. The gulf between their position and that of the artisans' families in the adjoining streets was positively immeasurable. True, the latter might sometimes have rather the better of it as regards mere personal comfort, and the education their children received at the Board school would compare most favourably with the smattering of French and music acquired by Lydia at the academy for young ladies next door. But in spite of these indubitable facts, every one recognized the difference in social standing. And to the sayings and doings of people in still loftier circles than her own Miss Smith was supremely indifferent. The civilized world, as far as she was concerned, was comprised in the parish of S. John's, Hillsbury, and conscious of living in the best terrace in that parish, she had every reason to be content.

In due course Lydia made the inevitable rash match with a handsome young clerk, of refined tastes and consumptive tendencies. From economic motives, Mr. and Mrs. Morgan continued to live on with Mrs. Smith, and after a time, two grandchildren were added to the family party. On Sunday evenings or Bank holidays, it was pleasant to meet the little party starting out for a country walk, each parent taking it in turns to push the baby's perambulator, whilst the worn elderly woman proudly brought up the rear, with her little grandson toddling by her side. A few years of uneventful content, and then came the usual catastrophe. Both the children were carried off in a sudden outbreak of scarlet fever, and poor Percy Morgan himself only rallied from the same illness to die of lung mischief a few months later.

There was not a more heart-broken woman in England than Lydia, as she sat by her mother's side in the lonely house, the evening after her husband's funeral. In vain, the older woman tried to distract her by discussing plans for the immediate future, feigning an amount of interest that she was far from feeling, in the hopes of rousing her daughter from her all-absorbing grief.

"Wait till to-morrow, mother. To-morrow I will try and help you," was the only response she could elicit from the little figure huddled up disconsolately in a corner of the horsehair sofa. And then the ceaseless moaning began again.

But it soon appeared that the two widows were not in circumstances to admit of their indulging in the luxury of much idle grief. Doctors' bills and the other expensive adjuncts of a long illness had made sad inroads on their little savings. Unless active steps were taken at once there would be difficulties about rent-day, and it would be impossible to maintain the former high standard with respect to ready-money payments. Then ensued a period of grinding toil, when genteel respectability was only maintained at the cost of unflagging effort. For ten hours a day, Lydia drudged as pupil teacher at her old school, imparting her own very superficial attainments to the younger children for a salary which, later on, would not have defrayed her glove bill for a year. Mrs. Smith in the meantime was fully occupied with household duties, uncomplainingly performed, although scrupulously concealed from the knowledge of her neighbours. For

the first time in her life she was unable to keep a regular servant, and far more bitter than the actual deprivation was the consciousness of her friends' probable comments on her reduced circumstances.

Two long years dragged by. Then there came a break in Lydia's monotonous work. The vicar's wife, taking compassion on her delicate appearance, sent her to the sea-side as nursery governess to the children during the midsummer holidays. A few weeks of sea-air and comparative idleness soon restored Lydia's health and spirits. Her sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks caught Mr. Brunt's attention as he walked daily on the pier. Recently returned from the colonies, where he had spent the greater part of his life, accumulating wealth in vast warehouses and dingy offices, he was perhaps not a very critical judge of female beauty. At all events, Lydia Morgan, in her old black dress, running races on the sands with the vicar's children, seemed to him a vision of loveliness. He had no relations to welcome him back to England after his prolonged absence, and ever since his return the pointlessness of his former labours had been forcibly borne in upon him. During forty years he had been steadily building up a large fortune; for his money had not been acquired by any extraordinary stroke of luck, but was entirely due to hard work. The years had not seemed long, nor the work hard, for throughout he had been sustained by the thoughts of the glorious time that was awaiting him in England. His dreams had never taken a very definite shape, and it would be hard to say exactly in what he expected his enjoyment to consist. But certain it is that he had never pictured the utter dreariness of a lonely hotel life, in what had practically become a foreign country. In this disappointed mood it was not wonderful that it occurred to him to better his condition by marrying the pathetically girlish young widow. Whether he ever correctly grasped Mrs. Morgan's position is doubtful. It is to be feared that the vicar's wife, in her kindly anxiety to provide Lydia with a home, cast a slightly unjustifiable glamour over her surroundings. Consequently Mr. Brunt rather felt that he was reinstating a fallen princess when he proposed to the clerk's widow. She accepted him, of course. Not that she cared for him, or thought him in any way comparable to the defunct Percy, whose portrait she kissed and

sobbed over as she made the momentous decision. But at twenty-six one cannot be expected to face with equanimity a probable half-century of pupil teaching, varied by prolonged spells of plain needlework. And then she thought of her mother's failing health, which rendered the heavy housework almost more than she could now perform, even with the help of an occasional charwoman. And the vicar's wife, who was something of a match-maker, called her an ungrateful little fool for hesitating, and made all the necessary arrangements for the wedding to take place very quietly, at the sea-side, a fortnight later.

Mrs. Smith was not present at the ceremony, alleging her ill-health as a reason for staying at home, although she expressed her thankful approval of the step in many affectionate letters. Lydia was much distressed at her absence, and seriously proposed returning home to be married, but the vicar's wife sternly negatived the idea. To say the truth, that good lady was growing terribly uneasy at the discovery of how very much richer Mr. Brunt was than she had at first supposed. She had only intended to provide comfortably for the little widow's future, not by any means to marry her to a millionaire. And it was with very mixed feelings that she saw Mr. Brunt proceed to adorn his future bride with a magnificent set of diamonds and various other costly pieces of jewellery. Then she began to realize that, mainly owing to her representations, a thoroughly worthy person, who might eventually have a seat in Parliament, and who in the meantime ought to be backing up his money with an aristocratic connection, was being thrown away upon the little pupil-teacher. However, there was nothing for it now but to push the matter through with a bold face, and trust to Mr. Brunt never discovering that he had been, more or less, married under false pretences. And to do this it was absolutely necessary to keep hard-working old Mrs. Smith in the background, alluding to her only, with picturesque vagueness, as an invalid who lived in strict retirement. It was perfectly useless to explain the matter to Lydia. She was far too simple and too indifferent to the match to scheme for its accomplishment, whilst the implied slight to her mother would arouse all the little anger of which she was capable. So the vicar's wife abstained from further interference and with a heavy heart undertook all the necessary arrangements, thinking the



while of her own four sisters, and an indefinite number of female cousins, who would none of them be likely to make half such a brilliant match as poor little Mrs. Morgan. It was with a distinct feeling of relief that she gave Lydia a parting kiss outside the church door, a kiss which appeared the height of kindness and condescension to the shrinking bride.

It took Lydia a long time to realize the potentialities of unlimited wealth. Her tastes were of necessity simple, as she was profoundly ignorant of the very existence of ordinary expensive luxuries on which rich people spend their money. In dress her highest ambition was to wear every day such clothes as she had formerly reserved for Sundays. As for her husband's presents of jewellery she quietly relegated them to the bottom of her box, dimly aware of their value, but feeling no personal interest in such unfamiliar objects.

"I am afraid you don't care for those necklaces and things," he remarked one day when they had been married a short time.

"Oh, really I do!" she exclaimed, flushing at the fancied charge of ingratitude. "They are very pretty indeed. But I can't help preferring things that I can use—like this, you know," and she held up admiringly a white lace parasol, a wedding-present from the vicar's wife.

Mr. Brunt took the hint, and in future determined to limit his gifts to thirty-shilling parasols.

The first year was spent principally in staying about at various fashionable watering-places. Once they attempted to settle down, and actually bought a fine place in the country. Being profoundly ignorant of English country life, Mr. Brunt soon found himself involved in an animated quarrel with a neighbouring Master of Hounds, who averred that for the first time in the memory of man several foxes had been found poisoned in the coverts. Poor Mr. Brunt was hopelessly bewildered by this attack, and, moreover, quite unconscious of offence. He had not given his keepers any orders one way or another. Besides, he entirely failed to grasp the heinousness of the crime imputed to him. But it soon transpired that, in consequence of these disputes, the few people who had called at first intended making no further advances, and that he and his wife were henceforth to be treated as social outcasts. So deter-

mining to have done, once for all with the troubles of a landed proprietor, he sacrificed a large sum to get rid of the property, and returned to hotel life.

Now Lydia, like the majority of her neighbours, was the creature of circumstances. Under the stress of poverty, and following Mrs. Smith's excellent example, she had been a most exemplary wife and mother. But she could not stand the deteriorating influences of perpetual idleness and unlimited wealth. The change first made itself felt in her attitude towards her mother. At one time the marriage with Mr. Brunt only appeared tolerable as a means of providing the old lady with an easy home in her declining years. But this scheme was gradually dropped, and at the end of six months Lydia had tacitly acquiesced in Mrs. Smith's continuing to live on in the old house at Hillsbury. It was an understood thing that her daughter should contribute liberally towards the expenses of housekeeping, and should also pay her repeated and lengthy visits. At the end of a year the first of these visits had not been paid. The allowance continued to arrive with the greatest regularity. That was Mr. Brunt's affair. And as regularly as it arrived Mrs. Smith consigned it untouched to her desk, for she was a proud woman, although too fond of her daughter to make a fuss. But of this Lydia knew nothing, as she fluttered aimlessly from one watering place to another.

It was in a large hotel at Brighton that the Brunts first met Lawrence Kite. This meeting was the turning point in Lydia's career. He took her in hand at once, and in an incredibly short time converted her, externally at least, into a fashionable beauty. Mentally, she remained astonishingly simple to the last, but this was not apparent to strangers. Unpleasant people shook their heads and talked about wily adventuresses, when Mr. Kite first devoted himself to Lydia. They were ludicrously wrong. The sole sentiment that Mrs. Brunt entertained towards her new friend was heartfelt gratitude at the fresh world that he had opened up before her wondering gaze. He first taught her the value of golden hair, backed by boundless wealth, and of how much can be effected when pink cheeks and blue eyes are set off by a Parisian dress. Under his tuition she at length began to utilize her dormant gifts.

As for Mr. Kite, he was a philanthropist in his own way. He

had already launched more than one pretty woman on society, grudging neither time nor trouble to secure his *protégés* a favourable reception. Like many other philanthropists, he was more than repaid for his exertions by the amount of fame which accrued to him as an original discoverer of social successes. It was positively painful to him to come across such a prodigal waste of raw material as was exhibited by a woman who, being young, rich and beautiful, was content to slip through life at seaside hotels. His discriminating eye perceived in Mrs. Brunt a combination that is rarely met with, of natural charms enhanced by adventitious circumstances. Given a start, such a woman might attain celebrity, and the position of her sole confidant and adviser would not be unpleasant. It is true that, on more than one occasion, Mr. Kite's *protégés* had summarily shaken themselves free of his guiding hand as soon as they discovered that they could thread the mazes of society alone; but there was a line of unsophisticated simplicity about Mrs. Brunt, which precluded the thoughts of such gross ingratitude on her part.

It was astonishing what an apt pupil Lydia proved herself. A prolonged period of luxurious idleness had acted like the waters of Lethe on her character, eradicating every trace of affection or unselfishness. Her early life, with its loves and sorrows, seemed like a hazy dream, and much of it actually faded from her mind. Her sole preoccupation in connection with the past was to scrupulously conceal from every eye the depths of poverty to which she had once been reduced. This was the principal reason why she resisted her husband's constant suggestions that they should visit her mother—a resistance so marked, that at length he let the subject drop, concluding that his wife and mother-in-law could not be on the excellent terms he had imagined.

"Mrs. Brunt, you must not go on living about in hotels," remarked Lawrence Kite authoritatively, when their acquaintance was a few weeks old.

"Why not?" inquired Lydia, with wide-open eyes. "It's very pleasant. One sees so many people."

"That's just it. You see people but don't make friends with them, or if you do they are only the second-rate ones."

It took Mrs. Brunt some moments to digest this piece of wisdom. She had recently become on speaking terms with the

widow of a City knight, and thought she was getting on rather nicely.

"You ought to take a place in the country, and a town house next season," continued the oracle.

"Well, I can't say about London, but I know James won't hear of buying another place in the country!" exclaimed Mrs. Brunt vivaciously. "He had trouble enough with the last, let alone nobody taking any more notice of us than if we'd been paupers!"

"Simply due to bad management. If you will only rely on me, I will undertake that it does not occur again," said Mr. Kite, unable to repress a smile at the lady's pretty petulance. But he was glad she retained such a vivid recollection of their own impotence to command success. It would strengthen his hold upon her in the future.

Mr. Brunt was more easily convinced than his wife anticipated. He readily saw the obvious truth that, at present, he was not getting his money's worth out of life. It was what he had been feeling vaguely ever since his return to England, though Lawrence Kite first put the sensation into words for him. With unquestioning trustfulness he was willing to be guided in all things by his new mentor, a man who was evidently well versed in the intricacies of English society, and capable of coping with the gigantic problems thereof. Mr. Kite did not shrink from the responsibility. He knew exactly what his new acquaintances wanted, far better than they did themselves. There just happened to be a charming house vacant, in a most select county, the shooting and society all that could be desired. It was such a place indeed as Mr. Kite would have dearly liked to possess himself, and that being impossible, he magnanimously secured it for his friends. He took all the trouble off Mr. Brunt's shoulders, and the latter, remembering the thousand pitfalls that lurked about the path of a landed proprietor, was quite content to fulfil the subordinate function of signing cheques.

"I hope we shan't find it very dull in the country," said Lydia, when Mr. Kite announced to her that the arrangements were practically completed.

"Dull! Why, there will be garden parties all the summer, where you can exhibit your best clothes. And in the autumn you must fill your house with people for the shooting."

"We don't know any people," objected Mrs. Brunt.

Mr. Kite naturally felt that this mattered the less as he had a large circle of friends, few of whom were too proud to be entertained regardless of expense. But it seemed unnecessary to enter into details at this stage of the proceedings, so he merely observed that if properly managed there would be no difficulty, and then passed lightly on to suggestions for the future.

"Next spring we must see about a town house," he continued, "And you ought to go to a Drawing Room as soon as possible. The question is, who can we get to present you? If I could only persuade my cousin, Lady Olivia Wade——"

"Oh, you need not trouble about that!" rejoined Lydia independently. "I daresay if I asked my friend Lady Tompkins she would do it in a moment."

Lawrence Kite shuddered. He feared that he should never make anything of a woman so obtuse by nature as not to perceive the different social value of a duke's daughter and the relict of a municipal dignitary.

"I don't think Lady Tompkins would answer the purpose at all," he said, in accents of mild despair. "She is all very well as an hotel acquaintance, but she has no position."

Lydia gave way at once. When Mr. Kite defined the only titled person of her acquaintance as having no position, she felt so out of her depth that it was useless to argue. Only she looked with increased awe and admiration on the man who was bold enough to utter such a sweeping statement.

## II.

LAWRENCE KITE was in his own way something of a small social power, although it was not easy to say why such should be the case. In appearance he resembled an unhealthy girl, and his manners were even more effeminate than his face. Most men considered him rather over-rated, but that did not prevent their wives from relying greatly on his taste. He was well connected, and contrived perpetually to render small services to his more influential relatives, so that they never entirely forgot his existence. Thus it came to pass that in the course of the autumn, he effected the apparently impossible task of getting Lady Olivia Wade to take up the Brunts. He was staying at Wade Park at the time, making himself very useful to Lady

Olivia, who was busy decorating the new wing of the house. His help was positively invaluable in dealing with dilatory tradespeople, and he had undertaken more than one special journey to town, to insure the correct matching of materials and wall papers. So the moment had arrived when he could gracefully claim a compensating favour.

"Besides, they are such nice people," he urged. "Of course Brunt is colonial, but nobody minds that now-a-days. And they are enormously rich."

"And is Mrs. Brunt colonial too?" inquired Lady Olivia doubtfully.

"Not at all! quite the reverse. I fancy she belonged to rather a good Scotch family, and her first husband was in the army. He died in Burmah, or somewhere. Anyhow, she was left badly off, and had the wisdom to marry old Brunt, who isn't half a bad sort."

"Then she is fairly presentable?" said Lady Olivia, evidently impressed by this fancy sketch.

"Presentable indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Kite. "Why, I shouldn't be surprised," he continued solemnly, "if she turned out to be one of the most admired women in London next season. And of course Brunt is quite ready to spend any money you like on politics. The right side, too. But some one must encourage him a bit."

"Really! Well, of course, under those circumstances, it becomes a duty. We can't have them to stay, though. I have made up all my parties till Christmas."

"Ask them over for the day," suggested Mr. Kite. "It isn't much of a railway journey, and you can have them met at the station."

Lady Olivia rather jumped at the idea. If at the cost of an afternoon's boredom, she could both propitiate Lawrence Kite and secure a valuable political supporter for her husband, it was surely well worth making the effort.

"That's settled, then," she said. "I will see about it at once. They shall come next week, and then you will be here to look after them."

"Well, I think you will find you are doing the right thing by asking them," replied Mr. Kite approvingly. "Old Brunt is sure to become more or less of a power with his money. And she is charming. However, you will see for yourself."



When Lady Olivia's invitation arrived, Mrs. Brunt felt that she had indeed touched the zenith of her fortunes. She had made great strides in worldly wisdom since the days when Lady Tompkins embodied her idea of the aristocracy. A few months' residence in an adjoining county had taught her the importance of gaining access to Wade Park. She had observed more than once the subdued pride with which a few fortunate people referred to their acquaintance with Lady Olivia, pressing it upon her attention in so unmistakable a manner, that she could not fail to grasp the subtle significance of their allusions. Speculation had been very ripe in that neighbourhood as to whether Lady Olivia would take any notice of these new people. The general opinion inclined to her ignoring them, as she had no fondness for new people, and they were not actually in her husband's division. But all their calculations were thrown out by Lawrence Kite, whose quiet hints and incidental suggestions brought about many more things than were ever suspected.

Not a circumstance was lacking to enhance the glory of the invitation, as Mrs. Brunt pointed out to her husband.

"If Lady Olivia makes such an effort to be civil to us at this distance, it shows that we are really becoming people of importance," she said gleefully.

"Well, I don't quite know about that," replied Mr. Brunt, who was not subject to illusions. "There's Kite, you see, staying at Wade. He's been working this invitation, you may be sure. He promised that if we bought this place he recommended that he would guarantee we had a better time than before. And I must say so far he has kept his bargain. It's a comfort to think we are getting something like our money's worth at last, but I don't know that I really care much for what they call society. You see I wasn't brought up to it, which makes all the difference."

"Oh, you get on well enough," said Lydia condescendingly. "If you had a little more self-confidence it would be all right."

"I know it. And after all why shouldn't I hold up my head with the best of them? I've worked hard to make my money, and don't owe a bill but what I could pay with the loose cash in my pockets. And yet, when I get out at parties, amongst all these gay people, somehow I feel out of place. If it wasn't for you, I declare I should take some quiet little house, where I could just smoke my pipe all day and do as I liked."

"What nonsense you talk!" interrupted Lydia. "Here we are being received by everybody, asked to Wade Park, Lady Olivia apologizing for not being able to offer us a room, and you talk about throwing it all up to live in some poky little house like retired tradesmen. I think you might remember that I am not as old as you, and wasn't brought up in a dingy office."

"I do, my dear, and it's a real pleasure to me to see you enjoying yourself in your own sphere," rejoined the grey-headed man humbly. He knew nothing definitely about his wife's family. At the time of his marriage he had gathered from the vicar's wife that they were well-born people, though under a temporary cloud, an impression that Lydia had never troubled to remove. Indeed, lately she had often dilated on the fallen glories of her house, until Mr. Brunt was half-inclined to think that the real reason she kept away from her mother was shame at having made such a plebeian match. Insensibly the breach was widening between him and this beautiful girl, who talked so glibly of her smart acquaintances, and ran up such exorbitant bills at the dressmaker's, that she seemed altogether a different person from the quiet little widow he had married. He did not grudge the money she spent so freely, and was genuinely pleased that some one should be enjoying the fruits of his life's toil. All would have been well if his wife had only cared for him. She had never done so from the first, but lately the fact had become much more apparent.

Lawrence Kite awaited with considerable anxiety the meeting between Lady Olivia and his new friends. It is so impossible to conjecture how fresh combinations will succeed, that his nervousness became excessive as the moment actually approached. But a glance at Mrs. Brunt as she stepped out of the brougham under the great portico completely reassured him. She had adhered strictly to his orders in the matter of dress, and a more perfectly turned out little woman it would have been difficult to meet. It was almost a shock to him to see with what ease she carried off the situation, claiming her position as a favoured guest, at once, and without the smallest hesitation. "Ah! You are here. Where did you drop from?" was all she said when, pitying her probable shyness, he interrupted a game of billiards to run out, cue in hand, and meet her in the hall. Mr. Kite saw at once that he might return to his game. He was not wanted.

Lady Olivia, with the dozen or so intimate friends who made up the house party, had been disposed to take the Brunts in rather a farcical light. There had been a good deal of talk about rough diamonds, and playful speculations as to whether Mrs. Brunt would wear her rings outside her gloves, and allude perpetually to her jewel case, after the manner of millionaires in fiction. But when she actually appeared, all inclination to mock died away before the perfect taste of her dress and the perfect coolness of her newly-acquired manner. Quite unintentionally, Lady Olivia began taking great pains to entertain her guest, and as a natural consequence all her friends followed suit. Lydia saw the whole process and smiled quietly. She had learnt a great many things lately, the most important being that the amount of attention she received depended entirely on the number of airs she gave herself. Out of many recent experiences, she had thus formulated a rule of conduct which promised to work admirably. Lawrence Kite was in a great measure responsible for this transformation, and still more so for having originally brought into play her imaginative faculties. Until she knew him she had been content merely to suppress such details of her past life as now seemed insupportably squalid. His hints had first suggested how much a picturesque background would benefit her position. With fatal facility she improvised noble ancestors and mouldering family towers. Mr. Brunt received everything with blind credulity, thinking, as he did, that she bore the stamp of noble lineage on her face and form. Lawrence Kite also listened with interest to her occasional outbreaks of family pride. He did not know or care about the rights of the case; but he held that a certain amount of mendacity was as indispensable to the success of a fashionable beauty as the judicious use of toilet accessories. According to his experience, both the powder and the falsehoods would have to be laid on very thick for anybody to take exception to them. And in the meantime her audacity amused him excessively.

"Really, Mrs. Brunt, it is quite a relief to get some neighbours in the country," observed Lady Olivia, in her most affable tone, whilst luncheon was in progress. This remark caused a sensation to run round the table. When Lady Olivia alluded to these new people, who were not even in the same county, as neighbours, it was clear that she meant formally to adopt them.

"Yes, it is pleasant," acquiesced Lydia. "Not that I expect we shall be at home much."

"Why? Is your husband thinking of standing for Parliament?" said Lady Olivia sharply.

"Oh, no! Not at present, certainly. Later on I daresay he may, but he says nothing will induce him to be bothered with it now." Lydia spoke with easy assurance, as if she had reliable private information that at least three constituencies were contesting the honour of sending Mr. Brunt to Westminster.

Lady Olivia, who knew better than anybody by what a struggle Colonel Wade had retained his seat at the last election, was uncertain whether to be amused or irritated. "And in the meantime, what shall you do?" she said drily.

"That depends a good deal on my health," replied Mrs. Brunt, quite unabashed. "The doctors are always telling me I ought to go abroad for the winter, but so far, I have managed to escape by staying at the sea-side. My chief fear is that I shall break down before the shooting season is over, and my husband will not hear of my going away alone, although he is such a devotee of sport. I often tell him he lives for nothing else, but I suppose it is a remnant of his old Australian habits." And Lydia laughed merrily, as well she might, seeing that Mr. Brunt's colonial experiences had been exclusively confined to the inside of a Sydney warehouse. "The worst of it is that nothing satisfies him," she continued. "We bought a charming place some time ago, a far better house than the one we have at present. And then, just as we had got over all the trouble of settling in, he became disgusted with the shooting, and threw it all up. So like a man! As if it really mattered whether one killed fifteen hundred or two thousand head the first day. It seems almost nasty to be so bloodthirsty, doesn't it?"

Lawrence Kite was listening with acute interest to Mrs. Brunt's artless babble. He had already heard more than one reason assigned for their hasty change of residence, but the story had never taken exactly this shape before. He glanced at Mr. Brunt to see if he would corroborate his wife's statements, but that worthy man was far away at the other end of the table, deep in conversation with Colonel Wade, and heard nothing that was going on. So Mr. Kite turned his attention again to Lydia.

"Do you mean you actually buy things in your country

town? Well, I call that really good of you!" she was saying in a patronizing voice. "I know it's what we all ought to do; but for my part I never can find anything fit to eat or wear out of London! Do tell me how you manage?"

"Well, of course it is rather different for us," answered Lady Olivia, half apologetically. "You see, Hillsbury is in Colonel Wade's division."

"Hillsbury?"

"Yes. It is our market town, about twelve miles from here. But possibly you have never even heard of such a place."

"I think I have, although I did not know it was quite so near here. I believe I passed through it in the train years ago. But it hardly looked the sort of place where one could buy much." Lydia spoke quite calmly. She had been prepared for something of this kind occurring, but knowing from past experience what an abyss separates county families from country town gossip, she felt that the risk of visiting Wade Park was really infinitesimal. The only contingency in which she might be embarrassed was if her husband happened to blunder out some reference to her mother. But he had never been at Hillsbury, and knew nothing of it except as the destination of his quarterly cheques.

Approaching Wade in the opposite direction, and along another line of rail, he would in all probability never connect the two places together. These reflections enabled her to listen coolly whilst her hostess dilated on the advantages and drawbacks of the situation.

"Yes, I assure you we get many things at Hillsbury. Almost every market day I make a point of driving in and returning with the carriage full of parcels, I do indeed!" And Lady Olivia smiled proudly, being firmly convinced that by this astute conduct she had won the six saving votes at the last election. "I always say," she continued, "that no sacrifice is too great to make for the public good. And after all, if the things aren't very nice, they will eat tons of anything in the servants' hall!"

"Oh, quite right, so long as one knows where it goes!" observed Mr. Kite, with an ostentatious sigh of relief as he helped himself to a sardine that he had been contemplating critically whilst his hostess spoke.

Lydia caught his eye and laughed rather more than the

occasion warranted. In fact her mirth was on the verge of becoming hysterical. Lady Olivia was not best pleased by this ill-timed hilarity. She took herself very seriously, especially where politics were concerned. From her point of view a sneer at electioneering tactics, as embodied in the purchase of Hillsbury groceries, was almost tantamount to an attack on the British Constitution. "Of course I can understand that such precautions must appear trifling to outsiders," she said, majestically. "But when one has been mixed up in politics to the extent I have, one soon learns the value of apparent trifles. A strict attention to detail and organization is what secures a seat. At least that is my maxim always."

The guests listened in respectful silence. When the wife of the county member begins to lay down the law on politics, she is not a person to be trifled with.

"My dear, don't you think our visitors might like to look round the garden and stables, as it is so fine," interrupted Colonel Wade, from the other end of the table. Fate had condemned him to rather a dull position, between an elderly dowager and poor Mr. Brunt, whose range of subjects was undoubtedly limited. Consequently he was not anxious to prolong the meal indefinitely.

"Your friend is certainly pretty," said Lady Olivia, lingering for a moment with Lawrence Kite, as the rest of the party started on a tour of inspection round the garden. "Rather an American style, though, to my mind."

"French dressmaker," ejaculated Mr. Kite.

"Oh, that's it, is it? I was wondering. But I might have guessed you would know. Rather a frivolous little thing, I should think—not what one would call clever," continued Lady Olivia, who could not quite forgive Mrs. Brunt her inopportune smile at the Hillsbury electioneering tactics.

"Clever? Well, I hardly know," answered Mr. Kite reflectively. He was watching Lydia, who made a charming picture walking slowly across the lawn, with the sunshine gleaming on her golden hair. "Oh, do take me to the stables first, please, Colonel Wade!" he could hear her saying. "It is rather naughty of me, but I really prefer the dear horses to anything, even the flowers! No, I haven't been riding very lately, but I hope that as I become stronger I may take to it again. Nothing like it, is there?"



"I think I shall ask those people to stay here for the Hunt Ball," remarked Lady Olivia rather inconsequently. "Gussie Devane had the impudence to say last year that my party was a regular collection of old frumps. I shouldn't be surprised if she swooned away with envy when she sees Mrs. Brunt's latest Parisian turn-out."

Actuated by this benevolent impulse, she hurried forward, and intercepted the procession on the way to the stables. "I am sorry to interrupt you all," she said, "but I must really take Mrs. Brunt off to see the decorations of the new rooms. I am rather proud of my taste, you know."

"I should like it of all things," began Lydia, "but Colonel Wade has just offered to show me the stables."

"Very well. He must show them to the others, then," exclaimed Lady Olivia, as her crestfallen husband turned away with the remnant of the party. "Come along," she continued, "I want to talk over a little plan with you."

Mrs. Brunt followed her hostess gladly, feeling that, although she had bravely faced the ordeal, it would be far easier to make apposite remarks over carpets and curtains than in the novel atmosphere of the stable yard.

"Of course we shall be delighted to stay with you for the ball," she replied with conventional calm to Lady Olivia's invitation. "We were thinking of engaging rooms at the hotel, and taking a party ourselves, but it will be even pleasanter joining you." She spoke rather as if conferring a favour by her mere presence, all the more so because she had to guard carefully against betraying the wildest exultation. Truly this was the climax of her success.

The new wing of Wade was worthy of more attention than Lydia could bestow on it that afternoon. She was solely preoccupied with her own overpowering good fortune. How Lawrence Kite had over-rated the difficulties that lay in her path; or, as she somewhat resentfully thought, under-rated her powers of surmounting them. Here was Lady Olivia already making flattering advances to her at their first interview. Visions of a presentation at the next Drawing Room, under the most auspicious circumstances, to be followed by the legendary glories of a triumphant London season, flitted through Lydia's dizzy brain as she listened mechanically to her hostess.

"And this is the new library," said Lady Olivia, throwing open

a door and exhibiting an empty room of noble proportions. "A fine room, isn't it?" she continued. "An oak floor, you see, and the walls lined with oak bookcases. How do you like the mantel-piece? It is generally considered a good piece of carving. We had an Italian over on purpose to do it."

Mrs. Brunt expressed herself in appropriate terms of admiration, as was expected. But in her heart she did not care at all for this somewhat sombre magnificence. However, the polished oak floor was delicious, undoubtedly superior to any of the hotel ball-rooms, which were the only ones she was acquainted with so far. It was with difficulty that, in her present state of elation, she could suppress an impromptu waltz; but with Lady Olivia at her side, gravely discoursing on the rival merits of various tradesmen, she was forced to be content with gliding lightly over the slippery surface, as they traversed the length of the room.

"We will go out at the opposite door," said Lady Olivia. "There is really not much to see here yet; but it will look better when the curtains are up. I hope they will be finished to-day. A handsome pattern, are they not?"

Mrs. Brunt glanced carelessly towards the great stone mullioned window, and for the first time noticed a woman stitching silently away at a great pile of rich material. She was working so busily that she did not even stop to look up as the two ladies walked through the room.

"I think those great orange sunflowers on the brown background will look well for this large room," observed Lady Olivia. "Some people consider the pattern staring, whilst others admire it excessively. The material is almost unique. There was only one other piece made, and that was bought by the Empress of Austria."

"Oh, indeed," said Lydia, staring vacantly towards the window. She was not thinking of the curtains, had not noticed either their colouring or material. Her eyes were riveted on the stooping figure of the old seamstress. There was something very familiar about the thin hands and the scanty twist of grey hair, just visible under the rusty black bonnet, as the woman bent over her work. Lydia felt a sudden choking sensation in her throat, like the premonitory symptoms of a hysterical attack. She managed, however, to cross the room steadily, and pass out through the door that Lady Olivia was holding open. But although she never

looked back, she felt instinctively that the old woman had for one moment glanced up from her work.

III.

FOR some time after leaving the library Mrs. Brunt was lost to all external impressions. From sheer force of habit she followed Lady Olivia down a long passage, and through a conservatory glowing with colour and fragrant with sweetly-scented flowers. But all the time she was going over and over again the sensations of that awful moment when the identity of the old workwoman was forced upon her. Then, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, she would persuade herself that it was quite impossible; she must have been misled by some accidental resemblance. She would return presently to the library and assure herself that such was the case. But it would be difficult to find an excuse for going back, and besides, supposing——

Mrs. Brunt felt that she should break down if this mental struggle continued much longer. It was a great relief when the footman presently came in search of his mistress.

"I hope you will excuse me," said Lady Olivia, breaking off in the midst of an eloquent panegyric on her gardener's peculiar method of growing camellias; "the housekeeper wants to speak to me for a minute. I see Colonel Wade and some of the others still in the garden. Perhaps you will go to them, and I will join you again presently."

Mrs. Brunt was only too happy to make any change, and felt that in the confusion of a large party her nervousness would be less noticeable. In the desultory conversation that followed she was able to sustain her part without flinching. When Lawrence Kite glided to her side and softly congratulated her on the admiration she had excited, she was even capable of a smiling response. "To-day has been a perfect success," he said. And she acquiesced, though her heart felt like lead.

Mr. Kite was indeed jubilant. He looked on Mrs. Brunt with the honest pride of a skilful artist contemplating the finished work of his hands. He alone could justly estimate what he had done for that woman, who, but for his benevolent intervention, would never have been known beyond a small circle of hotel acquaintances. Now, solely owing to his good services, she was exciting admiration, tinged by envy, in the representatives

of the best county families. Certainly, events had been singularly propitious. Even Mr. Brunt's somewhat stolid gravity only served as a striking background to his wife's charms. The silent elderly man had attracted but little attention. Still there was nothing about him to excite adverse comment. Besides, a rather picturesque legend had somehow grown up respecting his colonial origin, which amply sufficed to cover any deficiencies of manner, if such existed. Mr. Kite was very justly convinced that any small benefits that might accrue to himself from the riches and liberality of his new friends would be very insufficient acknowledgments of all he had done for them. What were hundreds of pheasants or hogsheads of champagne compared with the advantages of a good social start? But he regretted nothing. All of which goes to prove that Lawrence Kite was a genuine philanthropist.

"So sorry not to have returned before," exclaimed Lady Olivia, rejoining her guests after a considerable time had elapsed. "Such a vexing accident has happened. Don't be alarmed! It isn't to any of us, or even the servants. Only that poor woman who was putting up the new curtains; such a respectable old body, though. She was recommended to me by one of the Hillsbury clergymen, and she certainly gets through more work than anybody I ever employed before."

Lydia was choking so that she could scarcely breathe. Fortunately a chorus of voices asked the question her trembling lips could not form.

"Well, we really don't exactly know how it happened," replied Lady Olivia, "for there was nobody with her at the time. You remember, Mrs. Brunt, she was working by herself when we passed through the room. Then a few minutes later, when the housekeeper looked in, she found poor Mrs. Smith lying on the floor quite unconscious. We think she must have turned faint, or slipped when she was trying to hang up those heavy curtains, and fallen from the steps. She is better now, but seems to have hurt her arm a good deal; it was doubled under her in the fall. I don't know whether it's a sprain or a broken limb. Some years ago I went to a course of lectures on nursing, but it's so tiresome. I can't remember anything, except how to make a mustard poultice! So I have told the coachman to call for the doctor when he drives Mrs. Brunt to the station. And, by-the-bye, the carriage

is at the door, and I am afraid you must hurry off or you will miss your train. So sorry you can't stay longer!"

"What shall you do with—with that poor woman?" asked Lydia hoarsely, as they walked towards the carriage.

"That's the difficulty! Of course I must keep her here for the present, but, with the house full of people, the servants haven't much time for nursing. As for my curtains, I despair of ever seeing them up now! And I was so anxious to get that room finished, and fit to use before our next party. It's really too trying! However," continued Lady Olivia, who was really good-natured, "I am even more vexed about the poor old woman. Such a good upholstress, and thoroughly honest besides. I believe she has rather come down in life, and has rich relations, who have treated her badly, or something. The clergyman of the parish told me all about it once, only I have forgotten. At any rate she seems very poor now, and I can't make out that she has anybody to look after her at home. So very awkward not to know what to do! Now, good-bye. It's so pleasant to have met you at last. I will write again about the Hunt Ball, but don't make any engagements for that week."

Lady Olivia waved her hand, Lawrence Kite gave a congratulatory farewell bow, and the carriage drove off.

Twenty times during the short drive to the station Mrs. Brunt was on the point of stopping the carriage and returning at all hazards to her mother's sick bed. But this natural impulse faded away as her imagination pictured all the humiliating details of the necessary exposure. It was almost a relief when the train started and all further hesitation was impossible. Mr. Brunt, ensconced behind a newspaper, did not notice his wife's uneasiness, and during the hour's railway journey she was able at least to enjoy the luxury of silence. Many things occurred to her during that time.

It would be incorrect to imagine that because Lydia was not in love with her second husband, either at the time of their marriage or subsequently, therefore she had necessarily been unhappy. During the first period of their married life her feelings towards him were those of passive gratitude. Of late the gratitude had somehow faded away, its disappearance dating from the time when Lawrence Kite taught her that it was merely a privilege for a dull elderly man to lavish his money on a

charming wife. Regarded in the light of a necessary arrangement for financing her social operations, Mr. Brunt was admittedly invaluable. Beyond this he was simply a cipher in her eyes; elderly people, she considered, were apt to be tedious, and all that could be expected of them was not to interfere actively with one's enjoyment. It is surprising how well a married couple can get on with a very modest amount of affection, always supposing that neither party is cursed with a jealous disposition. In this case, the man's perfect trust and the woman's absolute indifference prevented either of them from indulging in disquieting suspicions.

"That's a fine place we were at to-day," remarked Mr. Brunt at dinner that evening. "Not that I care for those great build-ings myself," he continued. "They always remind me of gaols or lunatic asylums, and I catch myself calculating how many inmates they will accommodate."

"Wade Park is generally admired, I believe," answered Lydia, more for the sake of saying something than because she really took any interest in the subject.

Mr. Brunt laughed genially. "Whether it's admired or not, I know I was glad enough to get away this afternoon! I can tell you I was getting precious tired of sauntering after that crowd of fine folks all day, with nothing to do but to smile and smirk. Of course it's different for you, being to the manner born, as one might say. But I am too old to turn into a fine gentleman, and not old enough to become an idle one. So that's how it is." A deep sigh from his wife here attracted his attention. "Are you tired, or did the railway journey give you a headache?" he inquired tenderly.

"Oh yes, I am tired—tired to death!" burst out Lydia, in accents of such utter weariness that he was quite startled.

"Is anything the matter?" he began anxiously.

"Nothing! I am tired and nervous, that's all. I think I will go to the boudoir and lie down. No, don't let me interrupt you. I would far rather go alone." So waving aside her husband, she rose languidly and left the dining-room.

Mr. Brunt followed admiringly with his eyes the graceful woman, whose dazzling fairness was so well set off by the pale green folds of her richly-embroidered tea-gown. When the door closed behind her, he deliberately finished his dinner, thinking



the while of his manifest unworthiness to possess such a superfine piece of perfection. Then an hour later, having smoked his evening pipe, he went to the boudoir, and found his wife sobbing her heart out over some faded photographs and a shabby silver locket.

Mr. Brunt's astonishment knew no bounds. He had been married long enough to have reasonable grounds for believing that he had fathomed his wife's character, and up to this point it had struck him as the very reverse of emotional.

"Are you ill?" he hazarded timidly. He was not an imaginative man, and could conceive no cause for those quivering lips and long-drawn sobs, except physical pain. Receiving no answer he came a little nearer, and kneeling down by his wife's chair, tried with awkward kindness to comfort her. Quite unconsciously she shrank away from his touch. Deeply hurt, he hurriedly rose to his feet and stood with his back against the mantelpiece, in an attitude of uncompromising severity.

The silence was only broken by Lydia's hysterical sobs.

After a few moments Mr. Brunt felt that the situation was becoming intolerable. "Shall I ring for your maid?" he said stiffly.

"No, no! I must speak first. Only give me a little time." Lydia raised her head, glanced wildly round the room, and let it fall again between her hands. The silence was, if anything, more oppressive than before.

That lonely evening had decided Mrs. Brunt's fate. Sitting in her richly-furnished boudoir, surrounded by every luxury that extravagance could suggest or unlimited wealth procure, the thought of her mother had suddenly come home to her with overpowering intensity. She could picture vividly the sufferings of the proud, reserved woman, now abandoned in her age and weakness to the grudging care of strangers. And then came a rush of long forgotten memories, how in the days of grinding poverty her mother had toiled and struggled to support them all; denying herself sometimes even to the verge of starvation rather than that they should want. "Oh, how could I be so wicked?" groaned Lydia, as she recalled the weary, loving face that hung over her children's death-beds, and comforted her in those sad days of broken-hearted bereavement.

In the first revulsion of feeling after the callousness of years,

Mrs. Brunt completely forgot the fresh ties by which she was bound. For a time she lived completely in the past, wildly kissing and sobbing over the tiny relics that had so long been neglected, out of sight. An overpowering desire to be united to her mother, and to possess again some beloved object on which to lavish her pent-up affections, took complete possession of her mind. The appearance of Mr. Brunt suddenly dispelled this dream, and the actual conditions of her present life again became obvious. She was indebted to this man for everything; the rich clothes and luxurious surroundings, which had all become so much part of herself that she could scarcely fancy existence without them. What she had given him in exchange was not so apparent. Not love, certainly; that was tacitly understood not to be included in the bargain. But he had not been treated well in more tangible ways. When Lydia remembered the deference she had exacted on the grounds of her innate social superiority, no wonder that she hesitated to speak out and shatter the fiction, in virtue of which she reigned supreme. How Mr. Brunt would receive her confession she could not imagine. It was true that he had repeatedly expressed his intense distaste for the forms and ceremonies of polite society; but, on the other hand, she had just as often heard him assert his intention of getting his money's worth out of life. His marriage with the daughter of a seamstress, at present dependent on Lady Olivia's charity, could scarcely be held to fulfil these conditions.

"I must tell you at once, or I shan't dare do it!" she cried despairingly. "No, don't tempt me to put it off any longer. I am not ill really, and to-morrow I may have become wicked again."

"You are not at all yourself this evening, that is quite clear," interposed Mr. Brunt, fairly alarmed by his wife's violent excitement. "You had better rest now, and we can talk another time, if you have anything to tell me."

"Ah! you say that; but wait till you have heard all. I am not such a delicate creature as you take me for!" Lydia broke into a hysterical laugh. Then checking herself, she went on speaking very hurriedly, as if dreading that her resolution would fail. "You have been living under a great mistake, though I don't think it was my fault at first. My girlhood was spent quite differently to what you fancy, in poverty and work—hard work. Do you know what my husband was?"

"No ; some sort of business. But surely it is a matter of no importance now."

"Percy Morgan was a clerk on thirty shillings a week when I married him. In our best days we kept one servant-girl. Nobody who knew me now could believe how I worked."

Having once broken the ice, Lydia appeared to take a sort of curious pleasure in dwelling on these painful details.

"There was no rest for me from morning till night," she went on ; "but I was happy, working for Percy and the children. The darlings ! all gone, all lost to me now ! Here they are, my little ones. That is their hair mixed with my mother's, the gold and the grey. I never would part with that locket even when times were at their hardest," and Lydia, shaken with hysterical sobs, thrust the poor tawdry ornament and faded photographs into her husband's hands. She was long past noticing the absurd incongruity of her appeal.

"But you have not heard the worst yet," she continued. "How can I tell you ? My mother is not living as you think—as I partly thought. She is still working, is poorer far than you can imagine. I might have known she would be too proud to use our money whilst I deserted her. Ah, can you ever forgive me for deceiving you so ? That poor workwoman at Wade Park was my mother."

"That poor woman was your mother !" ejaculated Mr. Brunt, in a voice of thunder. It was far worse than Lydia anticipated. She cowered back in her chair, half fearing that he would kill her in his outbreak of rage. "That poor woman was your mother !" he reiterated ; "and yet you left her."

A long pause, broken only by the man's heavy footstep, as he paced up and down the room. Presently he stopped in front of his wife, and making a great effort, spoke calmly but with absolute decision :

"On one condition only I will forgive you. The first thing to-morrow you go with me to Wade, and we bring away your mother."

"To Wade ! Oh, how can I go myself ?" interrupted Lydia. "How can I face Lady Olivia and—and the rest ?"

"It will not be pleasant," said Mr. Brunt simply ; "but what is that compared with the wrong we have inflicted ?"

We ? That I have inflicted, you mean."

Mr. Brunt looked at the crushed little figure before him long and earnestly.

"If in this matter you feel like I do, there will no longer be any division between us. We shall devote ourselves to one object. If not, we had better part at once."

Lydia was still sobbing piteously, but during the last few moments a gleam of light had shone through the gloom. For, far away in the dim future, after climbing mountains of misery and wading through depths of humiliation, she foresaw the possibility of a happier life than she had ever dreamt of, with a husband whose love she was just beginning to return.

S. E. CARTWRIGHT.

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## Captain Hartop's Strange Experience.

I WAS sitting in the smoking-room of the Lord Warden hotel at Dover, waiting for the train to take me to London. My companion was Captain Hartop, of the 32nd Lancers, the regiment of which I was the colonel. We were returning from a two weeks' holiday at Monte Carlo, which we had found very pleasant after our hard work during the Soudan campaign. At the best of times I am a restless mortal; I never read anything, except the daily papers, and such books on military tactics as the War Office considers necessary for the enlightenment of commanding officers.

"This is a beastly hole, Hartop," said I, as I walked up and down the room. "In summer it might be bearable, but in November, and after the delightful climate of the sunny south, it's positively unendurable. I suppose it will be worse in London, but as the regiment is at Hounslow, we must go to that dirty suburb, whether we like it not. I say, old man, can't you say something to a fellow when he feels blue? Do you know of nothing that will take my attention from this infernal weather? You are as silent as a gravestone and you look about as dismal. Is anything the matter?"

The captain blew a cloud of smoke towards me, then, placing his cigar on the table, he replied:

"Colonel, I'm thinking. I confess it's a somewhat unusual operation for me, and it may surprise you to hear that I ever trouble my brain with work of any kind. But it's not that sort of thinking I am doing; I'm simply calling to my recollection the event that occurred when I was last in this town. You say it's a beastly hole; I quite agree with you, and I have some reason for doing so, although my aversion to it is simply on account of an unfortunate incident that happened to me here."

"A love affair, I suppose," I interrupted somewhat peevishly, for I was not in the humour to listen to that kind of tale, and my friend's countenance was gloomy enough to suggest that some story of misplaced affection was about to be unfolded. "I

do remember that when you joined us you exchanged from the 40th Highlanders, a regiment that had been stationed here for nearly three years, and I have heard it said that your reason for exchanging was unknown to anybody, a sort of mystery, in fact."

"Now, Colonel Carruthers," began the captain, in a very serious tone, "I have known you for some few years and I rely upon your honour as a gentleman not to repeat the story I am about to tell you without my permission." I readily gave the desired promise. Let me add that the story is so amusing that I have at last persuaded my friend to allow it to appear in print, upon the understanding that I give whatever remuneration the generous editor of this magazine may send me to Hartop's favourite society—the newly-founded organization for the suppression of advertising in rural places.

"You have had experience," he continued, "and you know how these things happen. I really think it will do me good to tell you the story. I must begin at the beginning, when the 40th had just been removed from Canterbury here. I was feeling a bit down in my luck in consequence of having left a very pretty and attractive girl behind in the cathedral city. I had seen her almost every day during the summer, and had made up my mind to ask her to marry me as soon as I obtained my captaincy—you will remember that I was only a subaltern when I exchanged. Heavens! how every detail comes back; I can see the girl now—tall, fair, blue eyes, and that beautiful complexion, pink and white, that all Englishmen admire so much. I'll tell you her name, colonel—Maud Hughlings. After being here a week, I realized what a fool I had been not to have settled matters one way or the other before leaving, and I wondered whether the curate whom I had seen continually at her father's house was going to cut me out. I need not tell you that I longed to strangle him."

At this point the narrator stopped to take a puff at his cigar, and I, quite unconsciously, commenced to whistle "The girl I left behind me."

"Colonel, if you were not my superior officer, I should call you a brute," half-shouted the captain with a blush. "As it is, I can only continue my story. Of course, every officer in the regiment chaffed me most unmercifully, and at times I was



more than pleased to get away from them. We had not been here over a month when a brother lieutenant, Payten, told me that there was to be a *bal masqué* for the benefit of the hospital, and he wanted me to go with him and his captain, Granby. The ball, he said, was to take place at the end of the following week, and we had plenty of time to get our costumes. I told him that I did not care to go to a ball at which I should not know a single person, and begged to be excused. 'You've taken it to heart this time,' answered Payten. 'I had no idea that the Canterbury girl had made such a deep impression. This time last year you were not satisfied with less than three balls every week during the winter.'

"As we talked we walked along together. It was a beautiful day and the white chalk cliffs, with the sun shining on them, seemed to make the fortifications look less hideous than they usually do. I had been moping around myself for some days, and I felt that I was getting quite sick of being alone. On second thoughts, I decided to go to the ball; there is always something interesting about a masked ball, and if I did go it would stop the incessant chaffing that I was receiving from all my brother-officers. 'I suppose I shall be bored to death, Payten, but I must take my chances as to that.' Payten, with his usual irritating way, slapped me on the back: 'You've mourned long enough, old man. As Shelley, or some other poet, says, "when we're far from the lips that we love, we've but to make love to the lips that are near."' "

"As we strolled towards the mess-room, we met Captain Granby, who could talk of nothing but the ball and of his numerous friends who were coming from London to attend it. Within a few days these friends arrived. As Granby was unmarried, they were, of course, all of the sterner sex, and I was a good deal surprised to find that one of them, who accompanied his elder brother, was a boy of not more than eighteen summers. What on earth could have induced Granby to ask a schoolboy to come all that way to spend three or four days with men at least ten years his senior? The lad's name was George Radstock, and as a mimic, I think he was the most remarkable person I have come across. He kept the dinner table in roars of laughter with his stories—some of them true, others manufactured for the occasion. He certainly possessed the most

wonderful control over his voice and eyes—and very fine eyes they were. In fact, he was a very pretty boy—not a hair on his face, and an abundant crop on his head. But, like most precocious youths, he was very conceited, as was shown by his absurd remark that the stage (he intended to adorn that profession) was a much nobler life than the army.

"Young Radstock's brother, Claud, was a very different specimen of humanity, being a middle-aged and grey-haired *attaché* of the British Embassy at Paris. He was home for a few weeks' vacation, and, although evidently well-informed, seldom opened his mouth. I think he strongly disapproved of his brother's excessive exuberance of spirits, but he said nothing about it. Granby's other visitors were three typical army men, who need no description; they were pleasant gentlemen of the aristocratic class, not overburdened with brains.

"Excuse the apparent digression, colonel; it was really unavoidable. I assure you I am making the story as short as possible.

"The evening of the ball arrived in due course. By that time my spirits had wonderfully revived. I had ceased to think continually of my *inamorata*, and I don't ever remember feeling more cheerful. It was the reaction, I suppose; but one's feelings are not easily accounted for.

"When we reached the Town Hall, in which the dance was being held, I found that it was quite easy to obtain introduction, and I soon began to enjoy myself immensely. There was a freedom about the affair that is not always present at London gatherings, and the ladies seemed to be most attractive. I had danced several times and the ball was in full swing, when I noticed a girl sitting alone in a corner, partially hidden by a curtain. Something about her attracted me as soon as I looked at her eyes, which, of course, were the only feature that showed through the mask. For a moment I thought that I had seen those eyes before, but after consideration, I concluded that I must be mistaken. After looking at her as long as I could without actual rudeness, I summoned sufficient courage to go and ask her why she was not dancing. She answered in that low, deep voice, which so few women have, that she preferred to look on. From that moment all other girls faded into insignificance; I felt convinced from her voice that she must be very charming."

Here my companion paused, rang the bell, ordered a couple of brandies and soda—a drink I detest—and, without waiting for their arrival, continued. "Colonel, I have often heard you make fun of the idea of love at first sight; do not do it any more—it's the only love that is lasting." After taking a long drink, speaking very slowly and dreamily, my friend said, "I can't tell you all that we said to each other, and I am afraid that you are being bored as it is, but, after a time, she suggested a walk in the garden at the back of the hall. The night was as beautiful as any night in September can be, and I was thoroughly pleased when we found a quiet nook where we could carry on our conversation to the accompaniment of the distant music and the low murmur of the sea. If a man has one spark of poetry in his soul, such a scene as that, and such a companion, must bring it out."

Here Hartop apologized for this sentimental outburst, and assured me that I should realize the truth of his remarks myself some day. I ought to say that I am a confirmed old bachelor, and that some of the boys in the regiment insist that, having been jilted in early life, I am now a woman-hater.

"You should have heard her talk. She seemed to have more brains than any girl I had ever met before, and her knowledge of nature—particularly birds, of which I am passionately fond—appeared to me quite remarkable. But we had not been sitting in the garden very long before Payten passed with a lady on his arm. He seemed to cast envious glances at me, and I thought my companion not iced them. At any rate she said, 'That is one of your friends, is it not? I think he wants you; had we not better go back to the ball-room?' I assured her that he was my friend, not my keeper, that he was evidently well employed, and that he could not possibly have anything of importance to say to me. I insisted that nothing would induce me to return to the ball-room, and that I wished that we could remain where we were for ever. She did not raise any serious objection to remaining for the present, and we continued our conversation. She told me a great deal about the place and the people, and her eyes looked so lovely all the time that I became more and more infatuated. She was the daughter of a retired naval officer, who lived at Dover, partly because it was a cheap place to live in, partly on account of its being in England, and yet very near to Paris—a city that had great attractions for him.

"At this juncture in our talk my fair companion suddenly informed me that she had left her fan in the dancing hall, and she asked me to go and look for it at the place where she was sitting when I first saw her. I thought that this was a trick to get rid of me, and I strongly objected to going, but she was obdurate, and I was compelled to obey her. To my surprise and joy I found the fan very quickly, and was hurrying back again when I met Payten, who stopped, and commenced in a whisper: 'Hartop, old boy, do exercise a little sense; you evidently don't know anything about the widow with whom you are having such a desperate flirtation. She's engaged to the most irascible French count you ever heard of. For goodness sake be careful.'

"At this moment Granby appeared upon the scene. Walking up to me he said in an undertone, 'May I advise you, as a friend, to pay less attention to the fair widow, unless you want a duel and the very devil of a row with a fiery Frenchman?'

"I didn't care one little fig for duels, for I was fascinated and utterly reckless. In language more forcible than polite I told both of my friends to mind their own business. I then hastened back to the garden and found, to my intense relief, that my divinity had not deserted me. A widow was she—that might, perhaps, explain the sad expression which her eyes at times wore; still, she was, according to my friend's account, going to be married a second time. She seemed to brighten up as I gave her the fan, and she thanked me for it, oh! so sweetly; but the wearied look returned to her eyes almost as soon as she ceased speaking.

"I did my utmost to resume our old frivolous talk, but the attempt was a failure, and at last I asked her the cause of her sadness. At first she ignored my questions, then changed the subject to some every-day topic, but after a time I succeeded in drawing from her the story of her life.

"She was a widow, as Granby had said, and was living with her father, as she had previously told me herself. When only seventeen her father had compelled her to marry old Sir Thomas Gascoine, who was old enough to be her grandfather, was crippled with the gout, and was burdened with a temper that made most people afraid to go near him. He had treated her like a brute, and when, after four years of married life, he was removed to

another world, he managed to vent his spleen on his pretty widow by leaving his entire property in the hands of a single trustee—a man as brutal as himself—and to this person, a French count, he willed his whole estate, if the young widow did not act in accordance with the executor's wishes. A more infamous will it would be impossible to conceive.

"‘I haven't a penny of my own,’ she said, in that beautiful deep voice I have already referred to, ‘and the count incessantly worries me to marry him. So fiendish’—she used that word—‘are his intentions that he has actually threatened not to give me a single shilling of my late husband's income unless I become his wife within the present year. I consulted my father, as any woman naturally would, under the circumstances, particularly when she has no mother; but he's not a sympathetic man, and his advice was, ‘Marry the count; he has the best champagne in France at his château, and he plays vingt-et-un better than any man I ever knew. I will come and live with you.’ I then,’ she continued, ‘unknown to anybody, took a trip to London, having previously made an appointment by letter with Mr. George Lewis, the eminent solicitor. I showed him the copy of Sir Thomas' will, which the count had given me. Mr. Lewis was most kind; but, after reading the document carefully for a few minutes, he assured me that I could not dispute the count's authority. If I did not act as he wished in any matter, trivial or important, he was at liberty to cease providing me even with the means of existence. I intend to marry him next month,’ she concluded bitterly.

"I was positively thunderstruck at this announcement; the very idea of marrying a man she loathed seemed inexplicable to me, and I told her so.

"‘What am I to do?’ she asked. ‘I am absolutely at his mercy, and he can deprive me of everything at any moment.’

"Colonel, I am a man and a soldier, and I'm hanged if I could stand it any longer. I seized her hand and kissed it, and vowed that she should never marry the beast—that I would save her, whatever the risks might be.

"She quietly drew her hand away, shaking her head mournfully.

"‘I must bear my burden myself; some people are born under an unlucky star,’ she murmured. ‘But there is always one way

out of one's troubles,' she added, in an undertone, as she glanced at the dancing waves.

"The thought of that charming girl being driven to suicide made me desperate. I would marry her myself and laugh at the future. I told her that I did not care two straws what happened before or after, if she would only consent to be my wife.

"She shook her head, and, turning her eyes full upon me, said, 'And what about Maud Hughlings?'

"I must admit that this question disconcerted me not a little. How could she know about my Canterbury flirtation? Oh, Payten and Granby had been gossiping so much that the story was all over the town. She kept her gaze fixed upon me and I was compelled to say something. As a rule I am by no means poetical, as you know, but that night I was so much in love that I had become sentimental. The Canterbury girl was nothing to me now; after all my affection for her was only a passing fancy.

"'You must know,' I said, 'that any man would drop a meadow daisy, pretty as they are, if he had the luck to find a rare and beautiful orchid.'

"This little speech, fascinating as it was intended to be, seemed to displease her considerably, as she drew her hand away from mine. An instant afterwards she exclaimed, 'I hear his footsteps; he must not see us together. Good-bye, forget me and my troubles.' 'Never,' I answered. 'I cannot and will not allow you to go like this. I must meet you again. Remember that as yet I have not even seen your face. Shall you be on the parade to-morrow?' 'No, no; please let me go,' was all she would say. After many entreaties, however, she finally consented to meet me at the back of the fort—a place seldom visited—at half-past eleven the following morning. She then hurried away and I saw her join an elderly foreign-looking man, in plain evening dress and without a mask. He might have been handsome once, but the signs of dissipation were now plainly marked; his face was red and slightly bloated, and I thought his expression was simply villainous. I am sure you can imagine my feelings, although you hate women. I seemed to know by instinct that she was going away with this man, without my getting a glance at her face. At any cost I must save her from that Frenchman. A thousand wild and impossible schemes passed through my brain, and while this mental process was going on, Payten came



up to me and asked if I was ready to go home. Of course I was; the ball had ceased to have any attraction for me. I was astonished, however, that Payten had any intention of leaving before one o'clock, the hour at which everybody—both ladies and men—were to remove their masks. His explanation was that he had a headache and was feeling generally out of sorts.

"Upon my arrival at the barracks, I put on a smoking suit and sat down in my favourite arm-chair. I was anxious to concoct some plan for saving the fair widow from marrying the villainous-looking Frenchman, and was so thoroughly infatuated that I was determined to succeed whatever might be the consequences. Before a quarter of an hour had elapsed, much to my annoyance, Payten appeared in my room; he proceeded to light his pipe and to make himself as much at home as if the apartment belonged to him. He explained that his headache had been caused by the heated ball-room and that a dose of *bromo-cafein* had entirely cured it. It was evident that I should not be able to get rid of him for at least a couple of hours. He informed me, to my disappointment, that Granby was coming to smoke a pipe with me as soon as he got back from the ball. At first he talked about the most ordinary subjects, and then began, quite suddenly: 'I say, George, who introduced you to Lady Gascoine? I always understood that Count Bava-roire never introduced her to anybody, and always fumed with rage if he saw her so much as speak to any other man. People say that she is very much in love with him, and I must confess that, until to-night, I never saw them apart.'

"This speech caused me to lose my temper, and jumping to my feet, I almost shouted, 'Understand, Payten, this unfortunate lady is, by the terms of her late husband's will, entirely under the control and at the mercy of this man. She loathes him as much as it is possible for any good, pure-minded and noble girl to detest a dissipated, selfish fiend in human form; it is my intention to save her from such a horrible fate as a marriage with this brutal Frenchman.' By this speech I had intended to convey an intimation that I wanted to drop the subject, but I was angry and had not realized that it would not have the desired effect.

"As soon as I ceased speaking, Payten began to laugh, and at the same moment Granby bounced into the room in a

breathless condition. Addressing me, he said, 'The beautiful widow is coming to see you to-night to warn you that her blood-thirsty lover intends to challenge you to a duel to-morrow, and to shoot you down, like a dog, if you refuse to fight; she will be here in a few minutes.'

"I interrupted the speaker at this point, as I was in no humour for any childish jokes. 'I do wish, Granby,' I said, 'you would stop this silly nonsense; it's really annoying to me.' 'I assure you, Hartop,' he answered, 'that I am telling you the truth. Lady Gascoine came up to me as I was leaving the hall, much to my surprise, as I was never introduced to her, and in a timid, excited manner, half whispered, 'I believe you are a friend of Mr. Hartop's; please excuse my asking you to take a message to him. I believe he has gone. Although it may seem a most imprudent proceeding, I must see him to-night, and I intend to drive to his quarters on my way home. I suppose my doing this will be the talk of the town to-morrow, but I have ceased to care what people say about me, and I must warn your friend of the danger he is in. Of course you must have heard of the Count Bavaire and of his *penchant* for duels. Well, he's furious because he saw me talking to Mr. Hartop, and he threatens to challenge him to a duel with pistols to-morrow. If Mr. Hartop does not agree to this, the count vows that he will shoot him on sight. I must persuade him to go away from here until the count's anger subsides. The impropriety of my calling upon a bachelor at this late hour might be lessened if you, after giving my message, would kindly stay with Mr. Hartop until my interview with him is over.' These last words were hardly out of Granby's mouth before I heard the *frou-frou* sound which we English call the 'rustling' of a dress. Before my visitor had time to knock, Granby had risen from his seat and had opened the door. The lady, to my surprise, still wore a mask, and neither bowed nor spoke until she was close to my side. She then addressed me in a far sterner tone than I had considered her capable of commanding. 'Do you still prefer the rare orchid to the meadow daisy?' she asked. I was about to seize her hand and press it to my lips, when she drew back and, bursting into a peal of laughter that rang through the still air—it was almost daylight—pulled off the domino, mask and wig and stood revealed—the boy, George Radstock!

"For a moment I was positively stricken dumb. Then I made a dash at that extremely clever youth. Had I had the chance, I believe I should have murdered him on the spot. But both Granby and Payten held me until he had left the room. For months I literally thirsted for his blood, and I should 'go for him' even now if I happened to meet him. Since that humiliating scene, however, I have never set eyes upon him."

Here I collapsed into roars of laughter; the story had interested and amused me. When I had sufficiently recovered to speak, I asked my companion if he had seen, or heard, anything of Miss Maud Hughlings, who appeared to have entirely dropped out of the story.

"She married the curate. Colonel, you are my commanding officer, but you are an unsympathetic beast, all the same; you've no regard for my feelings, or you wouldn't laugh at my misfortune like that. Remember that I rely upon your promise never to relate this unfortunate incident in my career to a living soul, without my express permission."

LAWRENCE IRWELL.

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## A Grecian Encounter.

By G. G. CHATTERTON.

HE was being bored to his extinction. She was being bored, though to a lesser extent. This, of course ; boredom, like other things, rooting its essence in comparison : therefore, whereas his *ennui* contrasted with the what-else-might-be in the life of man, hers compared merely with what came into the existence of woman—hence the danger of her non-survival was mitigated. The elective affinity of nothing upon earth to do, and an abnormal allowance of hours to do it in, naturally drove them together : besides, no man ever can stand being thrown entirely upon his own resources ; and though an occasional woman can, she prefers the society of one of the opposite sex to superintend her progress through the experiment. She was such a dear little thing, young, and of the evidently helpless, clinging order, made for man's delectation, that he really couldn't resist it, and she, moulded in the responsive nature, accordingly—well, responded.

Shrimpgate, the counterpart of every other dull seaside resort in Britain, presented absolutely nothing for him to do beyond in the morning lying full length along the sands, puffing a cigar and reading the London paper, as far as possible removed from the mingling strains of "Mascagni" on the German band, "D'isy" on the piano-organ, "Rock of Ages" by the blind man on the harmonium, and the noises of the nigger minstrels, the preaching layman, the children who bathe and the children who resist to bathe, that combine to swell the melodious total of the matutinal beach. In the afternoon a lounge on the parade, puffing more cigar, or on the pier, watching mediocre performances of sorts until the hour arrived for dinner at the yacht-club—the evening could there be spent passably, a chat and

smoke on the sea-commanding balcony, and game of billiards with any stray member turning up, bringing his day down to its whisky-and-soda *finis*. These, with the addition of an early plunge and swim in the waves, constituting his entire unvaried programme of events, what wonder then that the company of a guileless beguiler should be welcome to leaven all? save, of course, its opening and concluding portions. Happening, too, to be staying in the same hotel, it seemed nowise very remarkable or unnatural that often the times of their egress and their ingress should be identical, and the girl's chaperon didn't appear to notice it a bit. Aunt Mary in the mornings settled herself near the lay preacher, and worked warm, woolly shawls on the sunny sands, and in the afternoons caused herself to be trundled unceasingly up and down the length of the parade in a bath-chair, and, apparently, was quite indifferent as to how her pretty niece was passing her day.

"What! not ready to go out yet!" he exclaimed, meeting her tripping hatless down the passage.

"I must first write my letter."

"This is the third day this week that you have told me that," he said impatiently.

"One must write to—one's people," she smiled back.

He had been an ass, he told himself, to speak to her like that—authoritatively, reproachfully: a mistake, as if putting on rights of proprietorship with her. Poor little girl! How soft and shy she was. What a pretty, timid glance upwards she had given him when she pleaded writing to her people—but he must mind not to put ideas into her head. He was not more conceited than most men, but, hang it all, he had best be a bit careful. So he arranged to be more circumspect in his tone and manner as he lay on his back in the sun, with his hat tilted over his eyes, and from out the corners of them saw her presently approaching. She made her advance leisurely, keeping by the sea, and gazing out at it as if she never had observed him up there high and dry on the sands; and she promenaded herself along to where the cliff jutting out made a boundary, and thence she returned as in a circle nearer to where he was, her little feet gravitating by degrees towards him until she pulled up alongside him, he having meanwhile sat himself bolt upright, when, after a few words exchanged, she would seat herself near him. Each

morning these little manœuvres repeated themselves. But, in accordance with his decision, he did not receive her with effusion equivalent to his annoyance displayed at her postponement of arrival, noting which, the soft, shy little girl smiled a small smile all to and inside herself.

"This certainly is a beastly dull hole," was what he observed.

"It is not a gay place," she acquiesced amiably.

"Kind of place one could only stop on in just by way of filling up a gap before—er—going on somewhere else—or doing some other thing," he pursued lucidly out of the Machiavellian cunning of his soul.

"Just so," again she agreed.

"Nothing ever could induce me to come twice to such a place."

"Nothing ever will bring me near such dulness again," she declared so emphatically that he stared at her surprised. "But, of course, now I am here with Aunt Mary," she added in her customary gentle manner, and began plumping stones into the sea.

"Why does one always throw stones into the sea?" he wondered.

"Because you have nothing else to do when near it," she told him, whereat they both laughed, and in their laughter somehow melted away those prudent considerations of his.

She was such a pretty little thing, he was thinking, with her china complexion and red lips and great innocent blue eyes, and so nicely got-up, too; and he liked a well-got-up woman. That blue dress, with all the white lace, suited her down to the ground, and so did the wide-brimmed hat, with the crafty dints and hollows, that let you see the blonde hair waving and curling beneath it. Nearly every other woman in the place wore a hard round sailor hat, with a band of ribbon like his own; and he hated women's head-gear to repeat his own. Her little feet, too, artlessly thrust out in natty tan shoes, were so pretty; and so were the small, plump hands, with a multitude of handsome finger-rings. More than once he had found himself wondering where they all had come from, until, when she had told him she was an orphan, he had concluded they had been her mother's.



"How the diamonds flash in the sun," he said, watching her stone-throwing. "I like jewellery, and I suppose you do, too."

"Oh, I do," she answered, with a great deal more enthusiasm than she usually displayed; "immensely! I love every sort of jewel—diamonds most of all."

"Ah, yes, diamonds. I like to look at a lady wearing a lot of diamonds," he said, not that he was connecting this particular one with them: her fresh simplicity seemed apart from them.

"They are going to have professional swimming and diving off the pier this afternoon," he told her. "Will you come?"

"No—I don't know," she uttered vaguely.

"Well, but which do you mean? for I don't care to go to the place unless you do."

"Oh, yes!" with a start. "I beg your pardon; I didn't think a bit of what I was saying. My mind was wandering after diamonds. Yes, of course, I should like to go—with you," she concluded in soft undertone, and with that pretty semi-frightened flickering glance from under her lashes, which always, in his own language, "fetched" him. He liked these soft women, who could be pleasant without being clever; and she was not a bit clever, which was such a comfort, nor sharp, nor worldly, nor far-seeing, nor any of the horrid things so many girls were.

"You don't swim yourself, do you?"

"No, I never go into the water," with a little repugnant shiver; "it is so cold and wet and nasty. I like sitting sunning on the sands much better."

As she spoke her preference in her soft, cooing voice, almost instinctively she drew a little nearer to him, somehow insinuating to him that she liked better sunning with him.

"It's ever so much nicer," he agreed. "Especially in this country, where the ladies make such guys of themselves, even when they bathe in public. I was thinking that just now as I was coming along here past them."

"Don't they? Have you noticed one great fat thing in a very tight crimson suit? She looks just like a two-pronged radish. Aunt Mary always puts up her sunshade between them all and her as she goes by. Aunt Mary is extremely proper; she might be called Propriety in plain clothes."

He laughed. From some points of view he would not have guessed that Aunt Mary was this. Later in the day, on their way to their pier, they passed her encased in her bath-chair.

"Did you see her brown book upon her lap? That is Aunt Mary's prayer-book; she reads the Psalms for the day in it each day, and she reads them out loud to her bath-chair man; and as she closes the book he always says, 'Them was a beautiful lot we had this day, ma'am,' and then she gives him a shilling extra for himself, as it showed how he had been attending. Wouldn't it be funny having a tame bath-chair man to read out Psalms to!"

So she chattered through the sunny hours, and never bored him, her *nâiveté* was so amusing, and her pretty, flattering ways—so evidently without intent, thereby trebling their flattery—so charming; and they strolled about the pier and sat upon its benches, gazing over its edges on the professionals swimming and diving beneath them; and what people there were to talk, talked about them, and opined that it must end in a match, and said what an excellent contrast they would make, she with her innocent blonde prettiness, and he olive and dark with his bold black eyes. If one were to write down all they said through those loitering, Shrimpgate days, it might read a silly record but as everybody knows, it is how the words are spoken, not the things that are said, that turns the balance, so that still there lurked an under-current through the inanities of which each was conscious—moreover, he knew that she knew of it, and she knew that he knew of it. The best state of affairs in the world if only there was no such aftermath as consequences.

They were going for a long row one afternoon; he had arranged it all, he being the guide always and she the trusting follower, and allowing for a rest for his arms on a distant beach, it would take him all his time to bring her back for dinner with Aunt Mary. It was a day filled with hot and glorious sunshine, and she appeared arrayed in a bewitchingly becoming white costume with an immense white plumy hat to match. She had providently armed herself with a wrap, and as she settled herself on the cushions in the stern, and off they pushed, felt the comforts of her trip were sure.

"I like that great big hat," he said. It gratified her shallow little soul, he knew, to praise her things, and really all her wardrobe pleased him. "I don't know but what it's the very prettiest one you've got."

"I knew you liked it—you have told me so before. And so I put it on to-day."

To-day was to be a pleasant one, both felt, and—well, trifling may not last for ever; there might not come so many more of them, and better always toss your hay while the sun is shining.

It shone very brightly a long time this afternoon, and then, as they were on their return journey, grew overcast with grey, a breeze sprang up, which after the heat struck chill, and her dress being thin he recommended her coat.

"I will stand up to shake more comfortably into it," she said. And, how it happened none knew, but she lost her balance, and next moment went headlong overboard. In after her plunged he, clutched at her garments and fished her up with such amazing promptness, a few strokes brought them to where the boat had drifted on.

"Cling tight to the stern," he bade her, and scrambling overhauled her in after him.

So far, so good. But what now to do? Puffing, gasping, dripping, they faced each other; her teeth chattering, clothes clinging to her shaking limbs. Gone her warm coat in the wake of the pretty big plumy hat he had been extolling. With difficulty he dragged off his own and put it round her, soaked as it was, but better than none with the wind driving through her.

"I am *so* sorry," she gasped, "so ashamed. Oh, thank you so much. And I can't bear to take your coat. You will catch cold too, and it's all my fault!"

She sounded and looked on the very verge of tears, poor little drenched remorseful thing. With difficulty could he restrain himself from giving her a kiss.

"There was no fault," he said kindly, releasing an oar to stretch out a hand to place reassuringly over both her small trembling ones. "It was only a misfortune, and I am thinking how best to get you out of it."

The ultimate decision was to make for the nearest town, and

thence take the train to Shrimpgate, as the quickest and warmest way of getting back. So rowing to shore, and the boat left in charge of a sailor, they betook themselves to the small hotel, where they learnt there would be a train starting in half-an-hour, ordered tea and a fire and prepared to make the best of it.

"I will go out and see if I can buy a hat," he exclaimed, with brilliant inspiration, having borrowed a coat of the hotel-keeper. "Bareheaded is so disreputable."

"See if you can buy two, please," she amended.

So he went forth, and returned triumphant with twin hats, straw with ribbon bands. There was no difference, he had been told, except the ladies' were made a smaller size. He found her drying her hair over the fire, rubbing with a towel masses hanging to her waist, and she too had borrowed and was enveloped in a thick dark dress of the landlady's that would have covered two of her size. How pretty she contrived all the same to look in it, he thought, as she suspended operations to pour him out his tea.

"I do hope it will do you good," she murmured. "I feel so unhappy about you."

"Nonsense! I am all right"—he must *not* let the affair grow sentimental—"and now you must be getting ready to go for this train."

She began twisting up her moist hair, but still she persisted standing close by his shoulder. "I don't know how to thank you—you have been so good, so brave. You saved my life——"

"Nonsense! That was nothing. I mean"—laughing—"what I did was nothing. And now we must be off; we must put on our new hats and go."

"What guys we do look!" cried she.

"What on earth will people say?" added he with less sprightliness.

"How Aunt Mary will stare!"

"And question—carnival not being held in Shrimpgate."

"Nor Christmas—we can't be even mummers."

"Well, at any rate," he said, "we've got to face the music together."

How easily she took it; but then, of course, she couldn't be sharing his decidedly uncomfortable reflections as to the solution

of it all. As luck would have it, too, they turned out on one of the rare band-playings in the square near the hotel. Already the chains of coloured lamps festooned around were festively alight, all Shrimpgate alert and promenading, and many were the curious stares fixed upon their strange travesty.

In his heart how fervently he wished they all were at the devil ! Aloud he said :

"If only one could take to one's heels and run out of them without making things look worse——"

"But feel better. Oh, I am so cold !"

The next day she was in bed counteracting the effects of a chill, he was told when he inquired for her ; so he went and lay on the sands and smoked and thought all the morning, and the burden of his ruminations ran that the position did seem growing strained, and that this absurd affair of yesterday might work up to a crisis, and that everything all round might turn deuced awkward for him, and that, in short, the best thing left for him to do was to start away at once before she was about again. Poor little girl ! he was sorry for her. He was not above the average conceited, but still he couldn't help feeling that she did care about him—she had been too unsophisticated to hide it from him. It was leaving her too entirely to only the dull old aunt—selfish woman, going about in her bath-chair with her prayer-book, with no consideration for her poor, pretty little niece. He felt quite a glow of indignation over the self-seeking of the old lady. How much she was to blame if the poor child did suffer ! Well, a bolt was the best he could do for her. Better far for her to have him out of her way ; and, though he was no longer in the same hotel, they were bound to jostle one another daily in this confounded bandbox of a place. So he packed up his traps ready to start by the earliest train next morning, and then wrote his most difficult letter :

"DEAR MISS PIGEON,

"A telegram has just summoned me to town on important business, and, as I feel I cannot manage to return here, I must write to say how sorry I am not to see you again before I go, and to take my leave of you. I am anxious that you should know that I am about very shortly to be married, having been some time engaged ; so do not be surprised when you see the

announcement in the papers; and pray always think kindly of me, and remember that you made quite a friend of me. I should be quite unhappy if I thought you regretted those sunny days. I do hope that by this you have completely shaken off the chill of your unlucky wetting, and, with kind regards,

"Believe me,

"Yours most truly,

"H. LOVELACE."

He would post that by the last post, and she would receive it in the morning. Poor little thing! he did feel sorry for her. It was not so caddish when it was only to his own soul he was saying that it must be a disappointment to her. He would rather not see her when she was reading it, poor little thing!

Early next morning he, too, received a letter, and, as he turned to see the signature, his brow darkened, then cleared immediately. Had not his luggage even now preceded him to the station?

"DEAR CAPTAIN LOVELACE,

"I must just send you a few lines to say good-bye—for the present, at all events, as I am keeping my room all to-day, and to-morrow afternoon we go up to town. I have only got a slight cold, but am cooking up for fear of getting worse and red-nosey and looking horrid, as what we are going up for is my wedding. I don't think I ever told you I am going to be married to Sir Thomas Goldore, so I hope by-and-by we may meet again. You might come and call on us at 60, Park Lane, or do a little shooting at Goldore Court, which is such a nice place in Surrey. With best regards, and again thanking you for so kindly saving my life,

"Very sincerely yours,

"AMY PIGEON.

"P.S.—Do you remember once telling me you liked to look at a lady with plenty of diamonds? Well, I may hope then that some time you may like to look at me, as Sir Thomas really has been most dear and good and generous, and has already given me such *heaps* of them."



He laid the letter down in blank amaze. Sir Thomas Goldore! He knew him well by sight, the old City millionaire of seventy.

So that was what she had been up to all the time!—and, with intense vexation, certain lines in his own laboured, clumsy composition came before his mind.

And as he had finished reading her letter, the little thing was smiling over his. They had crossed pens as they had swords.

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## Alfred de Vigny.

THE author of "Chatterton" and "Cinq Mars," who was called by Gautier "one of the purest glories of the romantic school," presented nevertheless a marked contrast to most of its members. He was ready to uphold the doctrine and to bear the brunt of the battle; but, as a matter of fact, his modes of thought were different, his style distinct. He lived in a world of his own, opposing a delicacy and conventional sentimentalism to the brilliant facility, vehemence and loud-tongued enthusiasm of the brotherhood, which set him widely apart. He was perhaps the only one of the band—so strong in their opinions, so tender in the affections—not wholly beloved by the rest.

Sainte Beuve's scathing description of him, his punctilious manner, his taper fingers, *silky* eyelids, slightly closed, his thin red lips and pinched-up smile, could only be suggested by personal dislike, and the addition, "it is always alabaster, but alabaster slightly varnished," completes the picture, graphic to a degree, but incontestably cruel.

"A singular person," said Alexandre Dumas, with equal truth and less acrimony. "Polite, affable, and pleasant to deal with but affecting a complete and visible spirituality, which, for that matter, suits particularly well with his fine delicate features and long fair ringlets, like one of the cherubim, of whom he seems to be a brother. He never touches earth, and if for a moment he folds his wings it is as a sort of concession to humanity. *No one ever saw him eat anything.*"

The air of supremacy he adopted was, doubtless, somewhat aggravating, for although an ancient pedigree formed part of the programme of romanticism, the pretention was general rather than personal, and not always sustained by fact. The great master himself was not exempt from the ambition of possessing noble ancestors, although to trace back an unbroken line from the year 1530, it must have become necessary to suppress the calling of his grandfather, Joseph Hugo, who was a master carpenter at Nancy. However, there was no doubt as to the

high lineage of Count Alfred de Vigny, even if it may not have dated quite so far back as he would have it supposed. He was the descendant of an old provincial family, and but for the Revolution would have been the owner of large estates in Touraine. His father, Léon de Vigny, preserving the traditions of the old feudal seigniority, had served in the Seven Years' War until he reached the grade of captain, when he retired. He narrowly escaped the guillotine, but continued to reside in France, impoverished and broken-hearted. At the end of the Reign of Terror, he might have been reinstated, but was too proud to seek for a place under any of the new dynasties. Alfred was born in 1795, and was put to school in Paris, where he describes himself to have been severely treated by the masters and very roughly by the boys.

The melancholy sensitiveness which tinged the whole of his life may be laid in some degree to these first unhappy years; the strictness of discipline, the indifference of the professors, the complete absence of anything like kindness or sympathy drove him back into himself, and fostered the dreamy tendencies which were born within him.

It was the beginning of the great Imperial epic, and all young heads were turned by the first recitals of war and glory. The boy wrote home that the roll of the drum overpowered the words of the masters, and that the whole school could see nothing before them but the dazzling vision of the Emperor with his twelve marshals, his Old Guard, and the Great Army.

It was impossible to settle down to books, and what he describes as *un amour vraiment désordonné* for the career of arms took possession of him. His parents were forced to transfer him to a military college, and at sixteen he obtained his commission.

But in 1814 the Empire no longer existed. The strange atmosphere of romance with which Napoleon enveloped France and the rest of the world faded away. The momentary peace of the Restoration gave time to the most heated imaginations to cool down, and the brevet as lieutenant in the military *Maison du Roi* (re-established and recruited from the old aristocracy) that was accorded to the young De Vigny was not received with much enthusiasm; still less was he exhilarated when he found himself, only a few months later, escorting the berline containing

Louis XVIII. and the baggage wagons of a fugitive court on the road to Flanders. It was a miserable end to all his dreams of glory, and on his return to Paris, he found that the dissipation, arrogance and extraordinary privileges of the Maison Rouge having given offence to the rest of the army, the men were discharged and the officers dispersed among the foot regiments.

A military life in time of peace offered a sad contrast to visions of glorious victories, marches and adventures. Alfred soon discovered that he had made a mistake—that he was not, and never could become, a man of action, and was only fitted for a contemplative life. He enrolled himself amongst the writers of the *Muse Française*, the romantic organ of the day, and spent his days in the library of the Arsenal, where Charles Nodier had brought together Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, Emile Deschamps and a host of poets, artists and journalists. The ardent and impetuous spirits of the new school, sincere even in their absurdities, must have found it difficult to tolerate the affectations of their new associate, in spite of the mutual-admiration laws which governed them: they could have borne anything for truth's sake, and there was nothing real or spontaneous in Alfred de Vigny. The normal condition of his mind was, or appeared to be, a continual state of reverie, giving to his movements the slowness of complete abstraction, and when this was remarked, as he doubtless intended, he declared that he walked slowly in the streets because all his body was listening to his brain. This reply amused his friends, who spoke of him as walking about in his *tour d'ivoire*, ignoring all that passed because it suited him to do so, and that it was his wish to appear to live in a sort of seraphic hallucination.

This predetermined sublimity is manifest in his early poems and elegies: his constant aim was to veil his ideas in a delicate mysticism, and he used to contend that the silent song of thought must lose half its charm by being put into words. He professed to believe that the life of a poet was the life of a martyr, that his natural gifts predestined him to the rôle of a victim, that, belonging to an inspired race of men, such deep emotions were born in him that he becomes steeped in a sort of involuntary ecstasy, that his imagination bears him heavenwards, and that his sensitiveness is so acute that the pricks which others would hardly feel wound him to the quick: besides all

which his affections are overwhelming, and generally misplaced, since he is led astray by imaginative enthusiasm.

A grain of truth lies at the bottom of this grandiloquence, as naturally a man who lives in the seventh heaven of ideality is not well fitted for the battle of life, but we are set against the self-complacency of a portrait evidently meant for his own.

The overwhelming success of "Chatterton" obtained for De Vigny a far greater renown than his verses. The poet *d'une poésie blonde et ingénue* developed a dramatic power which no one dreamt of his possessing. It was one of the master-pieces of the romantic school; but, in direct opposition to the tumultuous and thickly-peopled tragedies of the day, it is a purely domestic drama without incident or variety, simply the pathetic life and death of a neglected genius.

The similar story of Gilbert and André Chénier, victims of exalted and impecunious talent, lent its vitality to scenes which produced an impression intense even to pain. It was said that Marie Dorval was seen to shed real tears in the part of Kitty Bell, and that the mixture of genius and despair was rendered by Geoffroy with terrible truth in his creation of Chatterton.

The play could not pass, however, without criticism, and in a paper of the day it was objected that, instead of painting human nature in general, the author has depicted a literary disease, a literary vice, that of many ambitious poets wounded and more or less impotent; that Chatterton is moving, but too specialised, too personal, more full of pain than passion—from head to foot *a literary rheumatism*.

The moral atmosphere was too much charged with electricity for such reasonable censure. It was the poet's hour, and De Vigny was hailed as the interpreter of his rights in modern society: there might be other sufferers in other vocations, but they had no such claim to exalted sympathy. The young Parisians were seized with an epidemic of Chattertonism like the Wertherism of a few years before in Germany, and Thiers, then Minister of the Interior, relates that not a day passed without his receiving from some poor author a request for employment in the terms, "A place, or I kill myself."

Some years before, De Vigny had written a novel, which has brought him in the end a wider celebrity than poetry or the drama. Whilst these were evanescent, "Cinq-Mars" was read

and fully appreciated in other countries than his own. The story is taken from the last years of Louis Treize, one of those striking historical romances ready-made to the hand of the novelist, who had only to select his personages from a court of intrigue and folly. The foolish king, the crafty cardinal, the brilliant heroine, the grand figures of the conspirators, already formed a group no work of fiction could embellish.

Richelieu was nearing his end; but still holding the reins of government, had succeeded in banishing Mademoiselle de Hautfort, whose honest and enlightened influence was always threatening his own disingenuous policy, and aware that Louis was always governed by his latest favourite, he sought to replace her by a tool of more manageable material. He happened to come across the Count d'Effiat—Cinq Mars—and imagining that he with his usual tact and experience could easily secure the co-operation of the chivalrous soldier, he loaded him with substantial benefits: but he was mistaken in the character of his *protégé*. Cinq Mars, brought over to the party of the Queen and the Duc de Bouillon, was persuaded to treat with Spain for the cardinal's overthrow. The secret alliance was discovered: compromising papers were found, and just as the conspirators were ready for action Cinq Mars was arrested and executed with De Thou, son of the historian, without much inquiry as to details.

It was thought that Louis himself was cognizant of the treaty with Madrid, and that he would have gladly welcomed even a foreign army to be freed of the cardinal; but he abandoned his associates without the faintest scruple, and when the hour of execution arrived, is said to have drawn out his watch, remarking to one of his courtiers, "Our dear friend must be pulling a wry face just now, I imagine."

Sainte Beuve would not accept the world's verdict on the novel, which he protested owed very little originality to De Vigny, since all the characters were adapted from real life, and even for that did not appear any more natural, and there is no doubt some truth in the criticism that too much systematic arrangement is perceptible both in incident and dialogue.

It was remarked that in the tender interviews between Cinq Mars and the Princess Marie de Gonzague one sees too clearly between them the figure of Monsieur de Vigny!



Some letters passing in 1823 between Madame Sophie Gay and Madame Desbordes Valmore, throw light upon the poet's social life. She describes that he was introduced to her by Emile Deschamps, and that amongst the charming celebrities of her *salon* she found him *le plus aimable de tous*.

This predilection was unfortunately shared by her daughter Delphine, then in her first youth and enthusiasm for all that was graceful and talented. "So much charm and genius," writes Madame Gay, "joined to a *bonne dose de coquetterie*, have quite enchanted her; and then poetry added to all that! The poor child was far from predicting how many tears so sweet a dream would cost her."

There was little fortune on either side, and on one plenty of ambition and a mother vain of her title, of her son, and having already other views for him. The separation was therefore necessitated, and Alfred, taking it very reasonably, wrote some pretty verses dedicated to her, whose *tristesse et pâleur* on the occasion only added, as he said, to her charms.

In after life, when he became the fervent lover of Marie Dorval, she fully avenged Delphine Gay. The actress carried all the tempests of theatrical art into ordinary life and was the sworn enemy of tranquillity. She was quite as passionate in love and friendship as the most romantic of stage heroines, and to expect anything like sterling qualities from such a disposition was to insure disappointment. For a long time the calm and constant poet refused to admit the moral obliquity of the one woman who had brought him, out of his *tour d'ivoire*, to feel warmly and unaffectedly. His friends were equally surprised at his passion and his blindness, but as soon as doubt became impossible, he calmly dethroned his idol and returned to a long-standing conviction that women one and all were too feeble of intellect to be held in any way responsible.

His marriage, which took place in 1828, appears to have been a fairly happy one. They lived away from Paris, at a château in the south of France, and a letter to Auguste Barbier gives a pleasant picture of their quiet country life. "I have just read your play aloud to Lydia: our windows were wide open, and whilst lamps lit our room the woods and rocks were illuminated by the moon; it seemed to me the old oaks were listening to the old poet: there you have my stage, my scenery and my

public." Still making himself the centre of his thoughts, De Vigny seemed to have found the tranquillity he desired, and although towards the end of his life he was attacked with a painful malady, it was said that no one would have guessed from the Olympian placidity of his face, and the calm beauty of his attitudes, how much he suffered.

Calm, cold and self-absorbed, he took no part in the political or social storms around him: the only interest he seemed to feel in any mundane thing was in the trials of men whose genius was stifled under the pressure of poverty; for these he expressed the warmest sympathy, and this one true note explains the preference generally bestowed on the tragedy of "Chatterton" over the spirituality of "Eloa" and the historic gravity of "Cinq Mars."

Sainte Beuve compares him to a certain artist who could only paint miniatures; all that was strong and grandiose was polished away; *the lightning was varnished*, and the gentler "Théo" finishes the portrait:

"When one thinks of Alfred de Vigny one involuntarily represents him as a swan sailing, the head thrown back, the wings half open to the breeze; or like the stars that shine less brightly than others, because they are so high and so far."

C. E. MEETKERKE.

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## A Girl's Jolly.

By ANNIE THOMAS (MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),  
Author of "DENIS DONNE," "UTTERLY MISTAKEN," "THE  
HONBLE. JANE," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER XXXII.

#### ROSE IS ROUSED.

"DOES Mr. Ogilvie know that you are entirely dependent on me, Sylvia? Does he know that Mr. Christopher heartlessly and wickedly cut you out of his will, on account of his jealousy of Mr. Dick Ogilvie himself?"

"My dear mother, is it likely that I should have told Dick all that during the few minutes he was here?"

Sylvia was looking very sunny and sweet in her widow's dress, but the sunny sweetness was not so apparent to her mother as it ought to have been, for as it happened at the moment, Mrs. Gould was conning the dressmaker's bill, and the details of that widow's costume staggered her.

"That you should have been sacrificed to that horrible old man for such an end as this; that you come back to me with shaken nerves, looks that have not altered for the better, and a host of bills which heaven only knows how I am to pay."

"It *was* a sacrifice," Sylvia said calmly, "for all the time I loved Dick Ogilvie so *awfully* that I would have lived on bread picked up out of the gutter rather than lose sight of him."

"He can never reward such devotion sufficiently," Mrs. Gould said impressively.

"Well, I am not sure about that, mamma. You see, instead of clinging on to Dick and living on gutter scraps, I married Mr. Christopher. I did *that*; and it shocked Dick, because, you see, he never knew all my reasons for doing it. It would have shocked me off loving him, I know, if he had married a rich repulsive old woman."

"It is infinitely more contemptible for a man to make such a marriage than for a woman to do it."

"I don't know, mamma. I am not sure that I think so. The same considerations may weigh with a man who is tempted to marry wealth and age, as with a woman: gratitude for the wealthy and aged ones; kindness to some one who is very dear to the young man or girl, and who wants that kindness badly."

"Sylvia, you are not going to tell me that you sold yourself for the few hundreds Mr. Christopher advanced to me when you were engaged to him? It was only a loan. I meant to repay it."

"Oh! let us forget all about it and him, if possible," Sylvia said impatiently, and then Lily looked up from the depths of the plump arm-chair in which she was comfortably ensconced, her dainty fingers busy at a piece of fine Mount Mellick embroidery, and said lightly:

"After all, mamma, we are none of us the worse off for Sylvia's marriage, as far as I can see. Your debts are paid, and Sylvia has gained a good deal of experience and a fair lot of jewellery."

"I have gone through a great deal of agony of mind in attaining possession of these things," Sylvia put in hurriedly, having no intention of being defrauded of the just amount of interest for the pain she had paid.

"Oh! 'agony of mind' is a thing of no marketable value—off the stage. One can't weigh it out and value and charge for it; but you can have your jewels valued, and you can get a fair price for them if you take them to the proper place. I can't feel Sylvia to be such an object of pity as you want to make her out to be, mamma. After all, what has she lost? Bubble and Squeak! Well, if a watchful eye is kept on the Home for Lost Dogs at Battersea, she may soon pick up an equally good pair of white bull-terriers. Mr. Christopher? You didn't want to keep him, now did you, Sylvia—honestly?"

"I didn't want to lose him in such a ghastly way, and it's cruel of you to hint that I am callous about it," Sylvia said, with angry tears springing from her eyes.

"I never thought of your being callous. I only thought of how I should feel myself," Lily said apologetically. "I am sorry

if I have annoyed you, dear ; but I know I shouldn't be annoyed about anything if I were in your place. You look much prettier in black than in colours ; you are going to be the mistress of a lovely place that is situated well within the bounds of civilization, and the wife of a man who is quite good-looking enough to make other women envious of you ——"

"Am I? I haven't said so, Lily," Sylvia interrupted, with the petulance which is the sure outcome of anticipated mortification and disappointment.

"You don't mean to tell me that you are not sure of him," Lily cried, sitting erect in the first flash of her surprise.

"How can one be 'sure' of anything of that sort?" Sylvia questioned. "We were very fond of each other—Dick and I—and I haven't got tired of being fond of him, though I have seen nothing of him for months."

"And fondness wants feeding as well as other exhausting and hungry emotions, of course it does. The expression of the eyes you love gets blurred by absence, the outline of the nose grows indistinct ; it would be silly to associate his manly form with the clothes he wore when you last saw him, because fashion changes, and he's wearing suits that are unfamiliar to you by this time."

Sylvia laughed.

"You have never cared for any one more than yourself, Lily, or you couldn't speak in that way. 'A man's a man for a' that,' though he may change the cut of his clothes ——"

"I sincerely hope that he has done so since you saw him last, Sylvia, otherwise he must look as if he had come out of the ark. Mamma, just listen to me. I know that neither Sylvia nor you think me very clever ; but I'm clever enough to know this, that the average girl may be cured of her infatuation for any man if he can be shown to her in baggy trousers and a coat that crinkles in the back."

"Then you mustn't class me with the average girl," Sylvia said stoutly ; "while I thought, wrongly or rightly, that a man was loyal to me, I would stick to him even if he wore Noah's coat, Shem's boots and Ham's breeks. But if I thought he had changed his heart, or his taste, or his fancy, or whatever you may like to call it, that he had bestowed upon me, then I should let him go without a struggle."

"No, you would not," Lily said carelessly, throwing herself back in her chair and resuming her book with the air of one who felt that she had contributed her full share to the subject under discussion.

But Sylvia wanted to hear more mention made of Dick, though she felt prophetically that it would not be pleasant hearing. Months had passed since the appealing little note which had been handed to him in court had brought him (unwillingly, but that she did not know) to her side, for an embarrassing half-hour. She had hungered over and over again to hear his name and to speak it. But until this morning her mother and sister had avoided the subject with what seemed to Sylvia either indifference or aversion. As a matter of fact it was neither of these things on Mrs. Gould's part. It was jealous happiness which kept the anxious mother silent. She believed that Dick and Sylvia were in constant correspondence, and that the latter was keeping her (Mrs. Gould) in the dark as to the terms they were on. On several occasions Mrs. Gould had seen letters addressed to Richard Ogilvie, Esq., Dene Prior, lying on the writing-table in her daughter Sylvia's room, and it naturally never occurred to her that these letters were unanswered; the truth was that Dick, being a coward, as many another man is when he finds himself in a fix between a couple of affectionate women, had put off the difficult day of writing to Sylvia until he could bring himself to tell her definitely that, their little romance being dead, it would be wiser to bury it out of sight and forget all about it as fast as possible.

At first he had suffered sharp twinges of self-reproach that almost amounted to remorse when her plaintive, half-trustful and confiding, half-impatient and uncertain letters reached him. But as the habit of putting them aside, and not answering them grew upon him the twinges became less sharp, and finally ceased altogether when he was able to tell himself truthfully that he had given no encouragement to write them or to rely upon him.

Rose Davenport had not paid her promised visit to the Warreners yet, but he had seen her several times when he had gone up to town, and each time the atmosphere of quiet faith in an absolutely perfect understanding of him which surrounded her intensified itself. They were not engaged, nevertheless he felt as bound, and, it must be added, as willing, to render to this



girl, who seemed to lift him up and out of himself and his less worthy past, the loyalty which she would have commanded had the bond between them been open and avowed.

It was a curious courtship, and to a less proud and more exacting woman it would have been an unsatisfactory one. But Rose knew herself and knew her man, and was as confident of his never swerving from her as if the archbishop had pronounced the alarming words which irrevocably bind a brace of human beings together for life and the little mystic bar of gold was already on her finger.

Trifles that would have worried and irritated many another girl were unheeded by Rose. When the Honourable Carr Reeves, prompted thereto by the pangs of debt and the aristocratic destitution which disabled him from going into action in the Cowes week and up to Scotland for the grouse later on, offered to make her the future Lady Jefford, words were spoken by her mother that would have clinched the matter favourably for the Honourable Carr in the case of many a girl.

"You must have some very good reason for refusing such a match—I mean such a man, Rose," said the mother.

"I have an excellent reason," Rose said with such demure complacency that Mrs. Davenport was hurried into the indiscretion of saying :

"Are you determined to throw yourself away on that man whose name was before the public in such a disgraceful way last year?"

"Mamma, you may be sure that I shall never 'throw myself away' on any man. You ought to have more confidence in me than to be afraid of anything of the kind, especially just after my having resisted Mr. Carr Reeves' blandishments and offer of a title in the future."

The tears came into Mrs. Davenport's eyes.

"Don't try to turn Mr. Carr Reeves and his offer into ridicule, Rose. I have suffered enough from that disappointment. It has been the dream of my life for the last few months to see you married into a noble house."

"I promise you when I do marry that it shall not be into an ignoble house."

"Then you have made up your mind to throw yourself and your fortune away on a man who flirted with his landlady and

carried on intrigues—that nearly overwhelmed every one of them with disgrace—with a maid-servant and her young mistress at the same time.”

“Dear mamma, you are overstating the case. He was in love with Sylvia Gould, but he never intrigued with Sylvia Christopher.”

“So he says.”

Mrs. Davenport spoke scornfully, but Rose was invulnerable in her armour of absolute confidence in Dick’s devotion to herself.

“If he was in love with her when she was Miss Gould, he ought in common decency to go back to her and marry her now that she is a widow and free.”

“Surely she cancelled the obligation on his part when she married?”

“I am not so sure of that, Rose. I hear from Mrs. Warrener that undue pressure was put upon the poor young thing and that she always preferred Mr. Ogilvie in her heart.”

“I wish Mrs. Warrener would mind her own business,” said Rose impatiently. “It puzzles me why people should trouble themselves ‘to hear,’ ‘conjecture,’ and ‘repeat’ gossip about what can’t possibly concern them.”

Rose was roused out of her habitual composure into an active feeling of contemptuous animus against Mrs. Warrener. Mrs. Davenport’s words were mere wind-bags; had Rose stopped to test with a pin-prick she would have discovered them to be mere airy nothings devoid of foundation or substance of any kind. In a moment of unwise confidence Mrs. Warrener had written:

“I hope while Rose is with us that I shall be able to persuade my poor little niece, Mrs. Christopher, to pay us a visit. Mercenary marriages rarely turn out well; hers has been no exception to the rule, and my sister can never sufficiently regret that she did not allow her poor child to follow the dictates of her own heart.”

Out of this paragraph Mrs. Davenport had constructed sentences which roused Rose’s ire against the innocent Mrs. Warrener, and made her (Rose) take a step which altered the whole course of the lives of three people. She went to call on Sylvia.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

"NOT YET," SAID SYLVIA.

IT seemed to Rose that there was something near akin to supernatural collusion in the circumstances which brought her a letter from Dick Ogilvie at the very moment when she was walking downstairs to get into the carriage to go and call on Mrs. Christopher. For an instant she gave way to her impatience to read what he had to say to her. She broke the seal and half drew the letter out of the envelope. Then she thought that it would be better that she should go to the interview with Sylvia unbiassed by such a recent direct influence from Dick. So she put the letter in her pocket, and drove off with it un-read to call on the widow who had been an innocent element in the shadiest part of Dick Ogilvie's career.

It was a mild, moist, early spring day. Nature had on her palest and most delicate livery of green, but there was still crispness enough in the air to justify the golden fur which bordered the collar, cuffs and triple cape of the pale grey-green Irish poplin which Rose Davenport wore. The dress harmonized with the little green velvet boat-shaped hat which sat upon her dainty head with that best expression which a hat can have, namely, the resolution not to budge an inch. She knew that she was looking as refreshingly pretty as the day itself, though hers was the beauty of shape and sympathetic and intellectual expression rather than of colouring.

It made her happier to know that Dick Ogilvie's long-looked-for letter was in her pocket at last, though she had the self-command to refrain from reading it until she had seen Sylvia. This self-command was the direct outcome of her mother's meddlesome garbling of Mrs. Warrener's inoffensive remarks. If Sylvia's claim on Dick had never been cancelled, then she (Rose Davenport) would have to own to herself that she had been either grossly deceived by him or feebly deceived by herself.

The period during which Dick's offer had hung suspended overhead, liable to descend upon her at any hour, had been a wise wait she had thought all along. There would have been

something rude and in bad taste if Dick had wanted to clang wedding bells in the ears and fling wedding favours in the faces of those who naturally, if a trifle inconsiderately, still regarded him as the primary cause of all the evil which had befallen Arthur Stanmer and his mother.

Rose had never been impatient for an instant. She had felt too sure to be impatient. But to-day, though she declared to herself that she felt sure as ever, that unread letter in her pocket seemed to send little nervous shocks through her spine and brain. She could neither sit quite still, nor think quite clearly. He had written to her before, but she had never felt so anxious to possess herself of the contents of these former letters as she did now of this one. But some stronger feeling than either anxiety or impatience kept her to her resolution of seeing Sylvia first.

Mrs. Christopher was at home, and alone, luckily for Rose, as it transpired. Miss Davenport's name did not convey much meaning to the young widow. It had been mentioned, she remembered, in the course of that one interview which she had had with Dick after her husband's death, but mentioned merely in a casual manner that awoke no interest in it in Sylvia's mind.

But when her visitor came into the room Sylvia's indifference fled, as the indifference of the majority of women was wont to flee, at sight of the graceful beauty of the young lady who appeared to be so unconcerned about it herself.

There was just a touch of stiffness, or perhaps ceremoniousness would be the better word to describe the manner of these two girls to one another, for a few minutes. But this speedily wore off. On Sylvia's side there was no suspicion of any, even of the faintest cause for, jealousy. On Rose's there was a proud, profound belief that she had entirely obliterated the image of the dainty piece of Dresden china before her from Dick Ogilvie's mind long ago.

"Perhaps you may have heard from Belle Warrener that I am going down to stay with them. My mother heard from Mrs. Warrener a day or two ago, and she says she hoped you may be induced to go down to Prior Common too."

Sylvia smiled, bridled and blushed, then answered with emphasis :

"Aunt Warrener is very kind, but it would be *quite impossible* for me to go down there yet. I have never pretended to grieve for Mr. Christopher, but I have too much respect for myself to commit such a piece of glaring impropriety as to go down close to Dene Prior *yet*."

"Oh! I think your scruples are overstrained. Nothing could be more natural, I should think, than that you should visit your aunt."

"You forget!" Sylvia said rebukingly. "You forget! Mr. Ogilvie is at Dene Prior. We both feel that it would be indecorous for me to go there yet."

An eager questioning light sprung into Sylvia's eyes as she spoke. Was it possible that this Miss Davenport, who had been so mixed up with the Stanmers, did not guess something of the relations that existed between Dick and his old love? Was it possible that in holding Dick aloof from her for discretion's sake, she had weakened the unspoken bond between them? She would set her doubts at rest, and at the same time open Miss Davenport's eyes without further delay.

"Perhaps you didn't read the accounts of that wretched trial? If you did, you must remember that it came out that Mr. Ogilvie and I were sweethearts, though we were not regularly engaged, before I married Mr. Christopher."

"Yes, I remember that," Rose said, smiling faintly; "but surely that is no reason why you and Mr. Ogilvie should hold aloof from each other. Surely you can be friends? You were both quite blameless."

"No, we felt we couldn't be 'friends,' that's just it," Sylvia said, laughing and blushing again, "so when he came to see me, as he did the minute the trial was over, I told him he must go away, and not try to see me again till all the scandal had blown over and we could meet as sweethearts again without outraging Mrs. Grundy."

To a close observer the slight spasm which contracted Rose's lovely brow and caused the corners of her mouth to quiver would have betrayed the agony caused by her rival's unconscious stab. Pride, love, the confidence she had so generously felt in him, were all mortally wounded. He had dared to delude her and let her delude herself with the vain delusion that his love and faith belonged to her absolutely and entirely. And all the while he had

belonged to Sylvia ! and Sylvia had held him back from openly proclaiming the engagement, or "understanding," or whatever they might be pleased to call the arrangement which Mrs. Christopher had made apparently, and which he had agreed to with proper obedience and humility.

Her soul was sinking within her. She had been proud of her pride and trust in the man whose best qualities she had discerned when he was still under a cloud. It stung her terribly that he should have been mean enough to seek and respond to the interest she had shown in him, such interest as she had never permitted herself to show for mortal man before, while he all the time belonged to this other woman. She felt as if she had lowered her flag for ever, as if she could never again hold up the head which was bowed with shame for him as well as herself. Still, in spite of the turmoil of spirit into which poor Sylvia's sanguine, unguarded and ill-founded statement had plunged her, Rose sat on composed as a young queen who may not betray the anguish of her soul to meaner mortals.

She sat on not with any desire to hear anything further about the romance which had murdered her own, but simply because she was physically incapable of standing up steadily or making a dignified exit. The unread letter in her pocket seemed to be made of lead—it weighed her down to the ground, it seemed, and her sight grew dim. Suddenly Sylvia receded into space, and her voice sounded like a humming-top or a buzzing fly a long way off.

When Sylvia grew distinct again she was leaning over Miss Davenport with a scent-bottle in one hand and a glass of water in the other.

"Are you all right again now?" she asked anxiously. "I was so frightened; I thought you were going quite off. I can't bear people to faint; it looks so dreadfully like death."

Her kind little hand was laid on Rose's; in an outburst of womanly tenderness and sympathy she stooped and kissed Miss Davenport's brow, and the latter had hard work to refrain from shrieking aloud at the contact of the lips which doubtless Dick Ogilvie had often pressed with his own. She held Sylvia back from her firmly, and stood up steady and strong, with the determination to die rather than let this dainty little butterfly, who had brushed off her most delicate bloom by marrying an old man for his money, suspect her secret.



"I am easily upset by the first warm weather. The spring always tires me dreadfully. Good-bye. I am sorry for having frightened you and given you so much trouble."

"Good-bye. You're a dear for having come. You'll explain to Aunt Warrener why I can't go down into that neighbourhood just yet," she added with a bright smile.

"I will tell her—what you have told me."

"I hope you will go and see dear old Mrs. Ogilvie—*his* mother, you know—she is such an old darling. And if you like you may tell her that I am just the same. She was always fond of me, only when Dick and I began to be in love we were both too poor for any prudent mother to let us dream of marrying. It's different now. I haven't a penny to bless myself with, but Dick is rich enough for both."

"You haven't a penny! Surely you're joking. Mr. Christopher's money——"

"Was all left away from me, on account of his jealousy of Dick Ogilvie," Sylvia interrupted solemnly. "It's awfully hard, isn't it? that I should have gone through such misery and such a scandal for nothing. Oh, he was a fearful hard-hearted, ponderous, obstinate, suspicious, vindictive old man. He had my two dear white bull-terriers that Dick gave me stolen and poisoned. But I forgive him everything, because I am so happy at being free once more, only mamma finds it hard to have me cast back upon her to maintain."

"I *will* go and see old Mrs. Ogilvie, and tell her you are just the same," Rose cried with sudden warmth. Shamed as she was through all her nature to have loved so slight a thing as Dick Ogilvie had proved himself, she might even yet climb back to a decent height in her own imagination if she could do some real good to this seemingly frivolous young woman who had been faithful in heart, though not in act, to Dick. The hope of being able to play this beneficent part acted as a tonic on her. She compelled herself to take leave of Sylvia cordially, and to walk with head erect and a steady step down to her carriage. Then she took out Dick's letter, and read what made her wish that either she or Sylvia or Dick Ogilvie had never been born.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## MAN PROPOSES.

"Dene Prior, May 20th.

"MY DEAREST ROSE,

"I dare to be presumptuous enough to call you 'my dearest,' because that you have been from the first hour I saw you, when you displayed sympathy both for a stricken horse and a slighted man. And that you will remain whatever your answer may be.

"My dearest! Will you marry me?—take me in hand altogether without let or hindrance from any one? I am a better fellow than I was when I first saw you, and with you for my wife I shall always go on striving to be a better fellow still. Let me have your answer at once. Not that I fear what it may be, for you have understood me well, and still have let me hope. Only I long to have that hope turned into a certainty.

"Yours absolutely and devotedly,

"RICHARD OGILVIE."

("Oh! Dick! Which are you? Knave or fool? Which have I been? A weakly self-blinded or a wickedly deceived woman? Oh! my shattered idol! You are no hero, but a man, and that a base one with a vengeance.")

It will be perceived that Rose, after the manner of women, went to the other extreme at once. Ordinarily, she was a reasonable, clear-brained girl. But the blow which Sylvia had unintentionally dealt to her (Rose's) pride had completely upset her judgment and reduced her reasoning powers to pulp. On Sylvia's assumption, Rose tried Dick for deceit and perjury of the deepest dye; found him guilty, without waiting for evidence, and condemned him to never more be officer of hers.

It was bitterly stinging; it was a hideously steep step down from that pedestal of true manliness on which she had placed him, to this dull plane of being monotonously

like—other men! Yes! here it was that the gall came in. He was no better—and probably no worse—than the Carr Reeves's and others of that ilk. He was faithless to women! Perhaps (who knows?) she might have exercised the god-like quality of forgiveness about this special vice if she had not been one of the women concerned. But, as it was, she had been proud of him, and proud of her own pride and trust in and love for him. And all the time he had been "hedging," the contemptible fortune-hunter! wavering in the balance between his inclinations, which were with Sylvia, and expediency, which made him desire to ally his fortunes with those of "old Davenport's heiress." She had no doubt whatever, as she drove home in her currently clairvoyant condition, that he spoke of her in that way, and "took her for granted" as an easily won woman whom he might make his wife any day it pleased him to do so.

No wonder, as these surmises crowded and jostled one another in her brain, that she winced under the anguish of the gall that another woman's vain imaginings, thoughtlessly worded, had established in ten minutes.

She lost no time in answering his letter. Not another moment longer than was necessary should he indulge in the insulting delusion that she was his to command, to be kept hanging on his will and pleasure, and taken for granted when he had finally decided that it would pay him better to marry her than to remain faithful to the dowerless Sylvia, to whom his heart had belonged all along, in spite of her having played him false once.

Accordingly, she wrote with scalding unshed tears in her eyes, and alternately a sharply indignant and a dull heavy hopeless pain in her heart:

"DEAR MR. OGILVIE,

"Thank you for the honour you have done me in asking me to be your wife, on the groundless supposition that I was hoping you would do so because I was kind to your horse and civil to you, when you both were strangers to me. I regret that I should have unintentionally misled you; but as it is only your sense of expediency, and not your feelings, which will be

disappointed, I feel neither remorse nor regret in declining your offer.

"Yours sincerely,

"ROSE DAVENPORT."

She "felt better," she told herself, when she had written this and sent it to the post; and that evening she made her mother very happy by saying, "she thought Mrs. Christopher a very charming little woman, and better fitted to be Mrs. Dick Ogilvie than any one she had ever seen."

"There can be no question about its being his *duty* to marry her, as he was careless enough to let his name be bandied about with hers while her poor dear husband was alive," Mrs. Davenport said judiciously. She was not at all clear as to what the circumstances were which had linked the objectionable Dick's and Mrs. Christopher's names together, but she was convinced they were "discreditable," because she had an antipathy to him as a possible husband for her own daughter. If this fear had not been in her mind, she would with real British matronly severity have "cried shame" on the wicked pair who could dare to marry and try to be happy, after having been depraved enough to love each other in the life-time of the lady's husband. But for the preservation from the snare of Dick Ogilvie, good Mrs. Davenport was ready to wink at any amount of immorality on the part of other people. Theoretically, Mrs. Davenport was strongly for the greater good of the greater number. But, practically, she was very much like the rest of the world, and was quite ready to sacrifice the greater number to the omnipotent number one! Her daughter Rose was dearer to her than the rest of the world put together, and she would have condoned the breaking of all the commandments on the part of other people, if by doing it they kept Dick Ogilvie and Rose asunder.

Meantime Dick, in happy confidence, was telling his mother that he was going to show her a girl soon who would, he felt sure, strike her (Mrs. Ogilvie) as being the very girl he ought to marry.

"Then I am sure she is not Sylvia Christopher," Mrs. Ogilvie said sternly.

"You're right, it's not Sylvia!" Then he felt that this sounded casual, not to say heartless, and added quickly:

"If I had married Sylvia when I wanted to I should have loved her better than any other woman in the world till the end of the chapter. But that was nipped in the bud by circumstances and herself. I couldn't go back to the scampish sentimental ass I was in those days, and she wouldn't like me if I did, for she has changed too. On the other hand, I shouldn't care for the altered Sylvia any more than she would for the altered Dick. The girl I am thinking of is ——"

"Miss Davenport, I feel sure," his mother interrupted quickly. "She was meant by *his* mother for your younger brother."

"She never meant herself for him; besides Arthur has stuck to his first love, Belle, all through."

"And he is an extremely fortunate young man, as she has 'stuck,' as you call it, to him. Ah, I should be a happy woman if *you* were going to bring Miss Warrener to me as my daughter."

"You'll like the other one better," he said, never doubting for a moment what Rose's answer would be. "By Jove! I could never run off the line if I knew those eyes were watching me. She's just a splendid girl, mother, and I shall be the luckiest fellow in the world."

"She shall not be embarrassed by me," Mrs. Ogilvie said earnestly. "I have always felt strongly that young married people are better alone; perhaps if your father had not been under the influence of female relatives I should have been a happier wife. I will have a house of my own in Prior Common, to which my son and daughter can always come, and I will come here when your wife wants me."

"You're not hurt, mother? I shall think you are if you go away."

"I must settle to go before she promises to marry you, then she will not have the feeling that she has turned me out, Dick. I *will* love her as a daughter, and you shall drive me round in search of a house this evening, so when she comes her first feeling will not be, 'There is his mother in the way.'"

"She would never have that feeling. She has a man's liberality and toleration combined with a woman's sweetness and tenderness ——"

"All women have that in the eyes of the men who love them before marriage. There is a pretty old-fashioned house at the end of Rectory Lane that will suit me if I can get it ; I shall be just half-way between you and the Warreners."

Before night-fall every one in the village knew that "the old lady was looking for a house as her son was going to be married to the rich Miss Davenport."

*(To be concluded.)*